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## Slavery on Their Minds: Representing the Institution in Children's Picture Books

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Slavery on Their Minds:  
Representing the Institution in Children's Picture Books

A Dissertation Presented

by

RAPHAEL E. ROGERS

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
of the requirement for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

May 2015

College of Education



Slavery on Their Minds:  
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RAPHAEL E. ROGERS

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family and ancestors.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my dissertation committee members, Maria José Botelho, Masha Rudman, William Moebius, and Denise Ives. Their attentiveness, guidance, and support made this dissertation possible. I am deeply grateful to Maria José Botelho and Masha Rudman. They were truly giving with their time and knowledge. This project exists because of the countless hours that Maria José Botelho and Masha Rudman dedicated to it. I was blessed to have them as the directors of this dissertation and as mentors. I also express a great deal of gratitude to William Moebius and Denise Ives for the insightful and informative commentary that they both provided me after spending a significant amount of time reviewing my work.

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## ABSTRACT

### SLAVERY ON THEIR MINDS: REPRESENTING THE INSTITUTION IN PICTURE BOOKS ABOUT SLAVERY

MAY 2015

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This study examines how slavery is represented in contemporary children's picture books. Given that many primary and secondary school teachers are committed to using picture book fiction to teach students about slavery, it is necessary to explore how slavery is depicted in these texts. One of the goals of this study is to contribute to the discussion about how the featured picture books engage with and respond to the early historiography of slavery, which asserted that Black slave were content and docile and that slave owners were kind and paternalistic. This study seeks to analyze how the picture books that make up my text collection respond to these claims. Another goal of this study is to present a rich analysis of how race, gender, and class are rendered in these texts using the theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches that draw on critical race theory, critical race feminism, critical multicultural analysis, and intertextuality. The findings show that the picture books in my text collection recast racial violence to reject proslavery stereotypes and counter historical claims of slave contentment by representing Black resistance against slavery. These texts complicate the slave experience by showing the various ways that race, gender, and class shaped the experiences of those who lived

during the antebellum period. These reconstructed representations of slavery showcase multiple perspectives and complicate power relations of this social institution. This study also offers a new approach for reading neo-slave narratives for children, which can inform classroom teaching of these texts, encourage readers to reconsider issues connected to noteworthy debates in the historiography of slavery, and show how class, gender, and race work together in these children's books. Furthermore, this study demonstrates that children's literature about slavery continues to perform important cultural work.



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## CHAPTER I

### SLAVERY ON THEIR MINDS: AN INTRODUCTION

*“Slavery is a memory of something we cannot remember, yet we cannot forget”*

- B. Jones (2011)

Slavery has long been a dominant and popular theme in children’s literature and it continues to be a topic that is often represented in historical fiction for children.

Throughout the past two decades there has been a steady stream of young adult literature and picture book fiction that focuses on this “peculiar” institution, so called because it was deviant, grotesque, and strange (Stamp, 1956). Some of these books have received national attention through Coretta Scott King, National Book, Newbery Honor, or Scott O’Dell awards. Other books on slavery have made their way onto library and classroom shelves and into the curriculum frameworks of many school districts. Furthermore, many fictional children’s books about slavery have been featured in noteworthy national children’s literary magazines such as *Book Links*, *Booklist*, and *The Horn Book Magazine*. Scholars have noted that representing slavery in contemporary times through words and visual images is extremely difficult because of the aberrant, violent, and horrifying nature of the institution (Connolly, 2013; Horton & Horton, 2006; Paton, 2005; Sims Bishop, 2007). However, this difficulty has not stopped children’s writers and illustrators from taking up slavery in their fictional works.

This study explores how children’s book writers and illustrators represent the institution of slavery through analysis of nine picture books that were published during the last two decades. In this study, *Freedom’s a-Callin me* (2012), *Heart and Soul: The Story of America and African Americans* (2011), *I lay my Stitches Down* (2011), *I Want to be Free* (2009), *January’s Sparrow* (2009), *Moses: When Harriet Tubman led her*



*People to Freedom* (2006), *Night Running* (2008), *Show Way* (2005), and *Sojourner Truth's Step-Stomp Stride* (2009) are analyzed to discover how children's writers and illustrators throughout the past decade have represented the institution of slavery in picture books.

### **Statement of Problem**

Although there are a significant number of fictional children's books about slavery (Casement, 2008), the amount of critical research studies devoted to these neo-slave narratives is limited and narrowly focused. This dissertation is a response to previous scholarly calls for diverse research studies about the representation of slavery in children's and young adult literature (Brooks & McNair, 2008; Hinton, 2008; Sims Bishop, 2007). Currently, most of the scholarship concerning this sub-genre of texts is primarily a celebration of Black writers and illustrators. Throughout the past three decades children's literature scholars have been primarily interested in highlighting and honoring the fictional works of Black writers and illustrators (Brooks, 2008; Hall, 1994; Harris, 1990; Hefflin & Barksdale, 2001; Lester, 2007; Sims Bishop, 1990).

In their research about the representation of slavery in children's literature, scholars have overwhelmingly focused on making claims about the roles that contemporary Black writers and illustrators have played in challenging racist stereotypes about Black slaves. The acknowledgement and examination of the use of historical fiction by Black artists and writers to challenge racist and oppressive discourses have significantly contributed to the body of scholarship about children's literature. Such fiction serves as an excellent example of the powerful role that artistic expression has played in the social justice movements of historically marginalized groups.

However, in illuminating the role that children's texts created by Blacks have played in challenging racist stereotypes, some scholars have relied on binary oppositions. The current body of scholarship about the representation of slavery in children's literature is dominated by studies that create a dichotomy between dissenting Black-authored contemporary books with the racist stereotypes about Black slaves that was prevalent throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries (Sims Bishop, 2007; Smith, 2006; Thompson, 2001). Because of the prevalence of this dichotomy in studies about this sub-genre of books the critical lens used to research them is narrow.

The use of a narrow lens has led to three distinct approaches in the scholarly examination of the representation of the slavery in children's literature. In one approach, scholars have focused primarily on the presence of racist caricatures of Black slaves that were published by Whites between antebellum times through the Civil War (Connolly, 2013; MacCann, 1998). In another, researchers have explored the various ways that late nineteenth and early twentieth century White children's writers and illustrator recast pro-slavery stereotypes in children's books (Birtha, 1988; Broderick, 1973; Connolly, 2013; Taxel, 1988). With the final approach, researchers have examined how Black writers and illustrators have created children's books that can be read as counter narratives because they depict life under slavery from the perspective of the enslaved (Brooks & McNair, 2009; Collier, 2005; Hinton, 2008; Harris, 1990; Sims Bishop 2007).

Although the research published using these approaches contributed much to our understanding of children's literature about slavery, the narrow analytical lens has created a circumstance where children's books about slavery written by Whites in the nineteenth and early twentieth have been evaluated and recognized for their racist representations of

Black slaves in a significant number of research studies. Meanwhile, children's literature about slavery created by contemporary White writers and illustrators has been largely disregarded in the research literature. Currently, scholars have created a context where fictional texts about slavery created by Blacks are viewed as legitimate and those produced by Whites are ignored or perceived as racist (Moore, 1985; Ryan, 2008). Opal Moore (1985) and Tim Ryan (2008) have noted that perhaps this situation has emerged because some scholars subscribe to the belief that it is extremely difficult for contemporary White writers and illustrators to create authentic fictional works about slavery. Consequently, while contemporary White writers and illustrators continue to produce fictional children's works about slavery, their books have received limited critical attention when compared to those that have been created by Blacks (Longee, 2001; Ryan 2008). Instead, the body of scholarship on this sub-genre of books predominantly examines the role that contemporary Black writers and illustrators have played in debunking racist stereotypes about slavery in White-authored texts from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

This dissertation moves beyond this context through analysis that complicates the dichotomy of authentic Black-authored contemporary children's literature about slavery and the racist narratives about the institution written by Whites in the past. While much of the previous research about the representation of slavery in children's books tends to solely focus on the racist historical discourse about Black slaves that was dominant in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this dissertation does not. Although this study takes up this historical discourse, it also examines how contemporary children's literature about slavery engages with existing historiographical debates about the institution. Whereas

certain analyses about the representation of slavery in children's literature suggest a singular response to the reading of these texts, this dissertation explores plurality. Where some scholars have positioned Black and White writers as dissimilar and sometimes at odds, this study will show that there are similarities between the two groups. Whereas most of the studies about the representation of slavery in children's literature feature race, this dissertation adds gender and class to its analysis.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore the intertextual relationship between the historiography of slavery and children's picture books about the institution. The study examines picture books created by Rod Brown, Elisa Carbone, Cynthia Grady, E. B. Lewis, Kadir Nelson, Andrea Davis Pinkney, Brian Pinkney, Patricia Polacco, Ntozake Shange, Joseph Slate, Hudson Talbott, Carole Boston Weatherford, Jacqueline Woodson, and Michelle Wood to situate them in the historical discourse about slavery in the United States. Additionally, a theoretical framing that draws on critical race theory, critical race feminism, and critical multicultural analysis is used to explore how race, gender and class are rendered in picture books about slavery.

The texts selected for this study were chosen because they provide readers with opportunities to consider what it was like to live under slavery and affords them with opportunities to learn about various historical discourses about the institution. These books also give readers a chance to explore complex and thought-provoking issues that affected the lives of people not only while slavery was legal, but also in the present. Moreover, this dissertation also provides insight into how readers can employ critical race theory, critical race feminism, and critical multicultural analysis to discover the

various ways that children's writers and illustrators represent race, gender, and class through their words and images.

### **Personal Connections and Contemplations: Researcher's Background**

I experienced many of the benefits of using fictional books about slavery in the classroom throughout my fifteen year tenure as a social studies teacher. In my first few years of secondary school teaching at a public school in eastern Massachusetts in the early 1990s, my interest and commitment to use literature to teach was heavily influenced by the interdisciplinary approach and curricula that I was expected to use in my history classes. Drawing on research that offered solutions to the lack of student engagement in social studies classrooms across the United States (Aaron, 1992; Anstead, 1993; Jacobs, 1989), my history department made a decision to incorporate a significant number of historical fiction works into the curriculum.

I witnessed the success of introducing historical scholarship to students through historical fiction during my three-year tenure at the school. The high student engagement that existed in my classes when I incorporated fictional texts into the curriculum units about Ancient Africa, Rome, China, Japan, and the United States supports research that asserts that historical fiction can be beneficial in the social studies classroom (Freeman & Levstik, 1988; Lindquist, 1995; Nawrot, 1996; Rycik & Rosier, 2009). In most cases when historical fiction was used as part of a curriculum unit many of my students appeared inspired, interested, and retained much of the historical content.

The pairing of historical fiction and nonfiction texts also benefited students because it helped students to consider the multiple perspectives that exist about history and inspired critical and creative thinking (Groce & Groce, 2005). The use of historical

fiction in my classroom also served as a powerful tool for integrating and highlighting the voices of historically marginalized groups such as children, women, people of color, and the poor. Because so many of the primary and secondary sources about history are written by and focus on wealthy White men, I found that using historical fiction was necessary to bring about the complex and balance perspective that I wanted my students to have as they examined the past. In my classes, the use of fictional picture books and young adult novels that focus on the experiences of children, women, people of color, and the poor in the history was a powerful practice to incorporate these groups into our discussions and analyses of history. The use of fictional picture books and young adult novels helped to, as Arthea Reed (1994) maintains, “reveal the complex nature of historical characters and bring history to life” (p. 121).

It is because of this experience that historical fiction became a big part of my curricular units throughout my teaching career. In particular, I often relied heavily on historical fiction that emphasized the experience of Black slaves in teaching the history of slavery. I frequently used this type of historical fiction texts in my curriculum units about slavery because they often provided different perspectives from the primary and secondary nonfiction materials about the institution that I was required to use in my classroom. Because of this, throughout my tenure as a middle- and secondary-level school classroom teacher, I advocated for the use of contemporary children’s fictional picture books and young adult novels that portray the complex experiences of individuals who lived during the days when slavery was legal. In my classes I found that these texts interested students because many of the works presented slavery in ways that they understood. These books seemed to interest students because they often featured young

characters, explored the extremes of practices, and emphasized human responses to slavery. Furthermore, I discovered that our classroom explorations of slavery using historical fiction often led to critical analysis of the complex and multifaceted history of the institution.

For instance, I used young adult novels such as Teresa Cardenas's (2007) *Old Dog*, a love story about two elderly slaves in colonial Cuba, to examine how age and gender shaped the experiences of Blacks living under slavery. We read Laurie Halse Anderson's (2008) *Chains*, which tells the story of a thirteen-year-old slave girl's fight for freedom, to explore the diverse experiences of Black slaves during the American Revolution. I also assigned Sharon Draper's (2006) *Copper Sun*, a novel about the relationship between an indentured servant and a Black slave, to examine the complexity of interracial relationships during the antebellum period in the United States. I also used Margarita Engle's (2009) *Firefly Letters*, a story that focuses on slavery and women's rights, to explore the roles that race and gender played in shaping the lives of Cuban women throughout the early nineteenth century.

The books mentioned above stimulated many deep and lengthy discussions among students about the various experiences of those who lived under slavery and the complexities of the institution. They also helped with the examination of issues such as author bias, distinguishing between fiction and nonfiction, recognizing power relationships, and comparing and contrasting multiple points of view. The books also sparked classroom discussions about topics such as the legacy of slavery, the role that government plays in shaping societal norms, and the various ways that race and gender shape people's life experiences.

Because of my experience using these texts, I agree with scholars like Kieran Egan (1986), Linda Levstik (2008), and Evelyn Freeman (1988) who suggest that fictional stories are an effective approach for students to engage with the history of slavery in the United States. In my classes many students became interested in learning more about the history of slavery because of the contemporary fictional children's texts about the institution that they were required to read. In fact, a number of students noted in the curriculum unit evaluative surveys that were a regular part of my classes that the fictional books about slavery were more easily read and understood than the expository writing and primary source materials that were featured in their history textbooks. A significant number of students also reported that reading fictional accounts about slaves made the topic interesting, appealing, real, and relevant. Because of these responses, I felt that many of the fictional books about slavery that I used in my class helped to bring this history alive and provide opportunities for students to critically analyze what life was like during slavery times.

However, simply assigning historical fiction texts about slavery was not enough to encourage critical analysis of slavery among students. The use of these books required careful selection, opportunity for discussion and reflection, and the willingness to encourage careful analysis from the various perspectives of literature and history. I agree with Christopher Worthman (2002) about the need to carefully consider how particular children's fictional texts can stimulate critical thinking that encourages students to see history as complex, significant, and relevant. I also agree with Maria José Botelho and Masha Kabakow Rudman (2009) that children's fictional books can help young readers



to examine how power is exercised, circulated, negotiated, and transformed throughout history and can lead to a consideration of how class, race, and gender shapes lives.

In my class, this type of examination was enacted when we read young adult novels like *Copper Sun* and *Old Dog*. For instance, on October 14, 2009, during a discussion in one of my American Studies classes about the young adult novel *Copper Sun*, a number of students commented on their ignorance about the complexity of race relations during slavery times. During the discussion one student asked if poor Whites who did not own slaves had limited power in the antebellum society. Another student talked about the surprise that he felt while he read about the stunning beginning and tragic end to the romantic relationship between a Black male slave and a White plantation mistress in the novel. The students' comments sparked a flurry of questions about wealth, power, race, and romantic relationships during slavery that influenced my decision to later incorporate into the curriculum a series of theme-based discussions that were based on these topics.

At times during these themed discussions, students were conducting "critical multicultural analysis" of the text (Botelho & Rudman, 2009). For instance, during our discussion of wealth and power during slavery times, I encouraged my students to unpack how power relationships are portrayed in *Copper Sun*. I asked students to talk about who had power when slavery was legal in the United States. Throughout the student-led discussions power positions such as domination, collusion, resistance, and agency were taken up and examined by rereading various passages in the text. I also periodically took part in the discussion because I was questioned about the frequency of Black slave resistance, the disparity in wealth among Whites, and the methods that White slave

masters used to control their Black slaves. In another student-led discussion of *Old Dog* on January 14, 2010, I also participated in the dialogue when students began to talk about the overall representation of slavery in contemporary young adult novels. During this discussion students raised questions about the authenticity of the story, the author's background, and the portrayal of elderly Black slaves.

It is because of classroom experiences like these that I continued to incorporate fictional texts about slavery into my curricula throughout my tenure as a classroom teacher. The use of these texts was so successful and my interest in them was so keen that I incorporated an extension and enrichment activity into my curriculum units about slavery that focused on independent student reviews of contemporary young adult novels about the institution. Because of this, in 2010, the students in my classes completed book reviews on picture books and young adult novels about slavery such as *47* (2006), *The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing: Traitor to a Nation* (2006), *Bell's Star* (2009), *Black Angels* (2009), *Chains* (2009), *Good Fortune* (2010), *Henry's Freedom Box* (2002), *The Letter Writer* (2008), *The Listeners* (2009), *The Old African* (2005), *Phillis's Big Test* (2008), *Pink and Say* (1994), *The Village That Vanished* (2002), and *When Harriet met Sojourner* (2007).

A year later, I also began to write about historical fiction that represented slavery for young readers. In the fall of 2011, based on the recommendation of my doctoral studies advisors, I began the process of critical writing about contemporary fictional narratives about slavery while I prepared for my comprehensive examination. As part of the examination, I began to write about how race, class, and gender were rendered in *Copper Sun*. In one of my comprehensive examination papers titled, "We Have

Something In Common”, I wrote about how the representation of the lives of the main characters Amari, an enslaved Black teenager, and Polly, an Irish White girl under slavery, may cause readers to consider the commonalities between poor Whites and enslaved Blacks during the antebellum period. In my analysis I paid attention to the social processes of the characters in the novel by reading the text against historical studies about slavery. I explored how Draper had represented the plurality of the White experience under slavery by taking up the issue of class. I also wrote about how Draper’s work gendered the slave experience and was recasting the assertions that had been made in recent historical studies about the institution.

Throughout the past five years I have been focused on exploring how children’s literature about slavery can be used in the classroom and examined the various ways that the institution is represented in this sub-genre of texts. Currently, although many contemporary young adult novels and picture books about slavery continue to be published, little information exists to assist teachers in using these texts. Although scholars like Rudine Sims Bishop (2007) have written extensively on effective ways to choose books in this sub-genre for the classroom, there is a need to further explore how slavery is represented in these texts and the various ways the texts can be used in the contemporary classroom.

I agree with Botelho and Rudman (2009) that there is need for scholars, educators and students to explore various critical practices that can be used to study children’s literature. Such explorations could assist teachers in how they go about choosing fictional children’s books about slavery for their students and but provide them with guidance about the various ways that such texts can be used in the classroom. Because limited

research has been done in this area regarding children's literature about slavery, forthcoming research that explores the critical ways that individuals read and study children's literature about the institution would certainly benefit teachers who use these texts with their students. Teachers certainly would welcome research that focuses on helping students to bring a critical lens to the study of these books. This study aims to provide insights about how to read and analyze children's literature about slavery. In my experience, any approach that allows students to explore critical issues such as power, race, gender, and class through the texts that they read in school definitely enhances the classroom experience for both teacher and student.

### **Research Questions**

The overall goal of this study is to identify connections between the historiography of slavery and neo-slave narratives written for children. This project illustrates that select neo-slave narratives can help readers to recognize various arguments and perspectives found in the historiography of slavery. It shows that these texts can help enhance young readers' understanding of various historical discourses about the institution. It also reveals how race, gender, and class are rendered in the picture books featured in my text collection.

To support these assertions this study will explore the following questions:

1. How do the words and images of nine picture books published between 2005 to 2012 engage with and respond to specific discourses found in the early historiography of slavery?
2. How are power relations of race, gender, and class represented in these picture books about slavery?

## Significance of the Study

Books with Black protagonists have been largely unrecognized when compared to the number of critical studies that have been completed about texts that feature White characters (Kutenplon & Olmstead, 1996). Violet Harris (1990) points out that although children's literature that features Blacks has existed since the 1890s, the amount of research devoted to it has been limited. In a recently published book titled *Embracing, Evaluating, and Examining African American Children's and Young Adult Literature*, KaaVonnia Hinton (2008) also notes this phenomenon and calls for more critical studies about children and young adult literature that feature Black characters. To Hinton, the issue is important because literature does not become recognized, tangible, or commemorated unless it is discussed. This study is significant because it helps to address the aforementioned void in the research literature about children's and young adult literature that focuses on Blacks. Foregrounded in this study are nine picture books that feature Black protagonists and supporting characters.

This study is also significant because it provides much needed depth to the small body of scholarship that focuses on children's and young adult literature about slavery. While there are a number of studies about the role that this sub-genre of texts plays in empowering Black readers (Brooks, 2008; Hall, 1994; Harris, 1990; Hefflin & Barksdale, 2001; Lester, 2007; Sims Bishop, 1982, 1990, 2007; Thompson, 2001), there are few that have fully explored the issues of intertextuality and historical discourse in these books (Connolly, 2013; Sims Bishop, 2007). Because these two issues have played a significant role in the development of the texts, this dissertation provides important new insights into how we read and analyze them. Moreover, in foregrounding intertextuality and historical

discourse, this study serves as an excellent tool for educators who are searching for new ways to incorporate fictional texts about slavery into their English and Social Studies classroom curricula.

Additionally, as a critical study that features fictional books about slavery, this dissertation makes multiple contributions to the field of children's and young adult literature, critical multicultural education, teacher education, and critical literacy pedagogies. The dissertation also provides analysis of picture books about slavery that have received little critical attention. My examination of children's books by writers and illustrators like Elisa Carbone (2008), Cynthia Grady (2012), Carole Boston Weatherford (2005), and Michelle Wood (2011) will hopefully provide educators with insights about alternative texts to use in their classrooms when exploring the topic of slavery. Moreover, it is my hope that the analysis of the books found in this dissertation will also provide insight into alternative critical practices for reading and using children's literature about slavery in elementary, middle, and high school classrooms.

### **Defining the Neo-Slave Narrative**

While slave narratives are texts written by Blacks who were enslaved and lived during the antebellum period, neo-slave narratives are fictional works written by contemporary writers who retell and recast the slave experience in the Americas. Frequently, based on historical documents and scholarship about slavery, neo-slave narratives present imaginative depictions of the lives of those who lived under slavery (Hinton, 2008). Bernard Bell (1987), who is credited with the initial definition of the neo-slave narrative, refers to them as "residually oral, moral narratives from bondage to freedom" (p. 289). However, Ashraf Rushdy (1999) offers a slightly different definition

for the term. He refers to neo-slave narratives as fictional texts that often “assume the form, take on the conventions, and take on the first person voice of the antebellum slave narrative” (p. 3). Additionally, in an entry in the *Oxford Companion to African American Literature* (1999), Rushdy maintains that there are at least four types of neo-slave narratives:

1. Historical novels about slavery that are written in first or third person.
2. Novels about slavery’s effects on contemporary society.
3. Narratives that trace the history of slave importation and enslavement.
4. Narratives that adhere to the form of traditional slave narratives.

Elizabeth Ann Beaulieu (1999) offers a still broader definition. She defines neo-slave narratives as “contemporary fictional works which take slavery as a subject matter and usually feature enslaved protagonists” (p. xiv). To Beaulieu, neo-slave narratives rely upon the historical recovery efforts of slave narrative scholars to represent history from the perspective of the enslaved.

Although the scholars named above vary in their definitions, in the world of literature it is generally agreed that a neo-slave narrative is a contemporary fictional text that takes up the issue of slavery and represents the lives of those who lived under this institution. Dubey (2010) writes that these texts have been very popular in both children’s and adult literature since the mid-1960s. She points out that since the 1966 publication of Margaret Walker’s adult novel *Jubilee*, there has been an outpouring of neo-slave narratives that has continued unabated into the present century. Dubey also notes that it is important to recognize that these narratives come in a wide array of forms. These forms include picture books, poetry collections, novels in verse, realist historical fiction,

historiographic metafiction, ghost stories, fantasy, vampire tales, and speculative and science fiction.

### **Neo-Slave Narratives for Youth**

Since the late 1960s a steady stream of books about slavery written for youth has been published by an interracial group of writers and illustrators. Julius Lester's (1968) *To Be a Slave*, named the Newbery Honor book in 1969, is the first noteworthy contemporary young adult text that scholars regard as written in the tradition of the neo-slave narrative (Hinton, 2008; Rushdy, 2004). Using the words of former slaves who participated in the Federal Writer's Project, Lester presents stories of Black men, women, and children who were forced to live under the condition of slavery. In his book Lester details the harsh living conditions that existed under slavery and represents the Black slave responses to the oppressive institution. To Lester the book attempts to tell the stories of those who were once slaves. It seeks to show their humanity and to educate young readers about connections between the slave past and the present. *To Be a Slave* is important because of its use of the oral tradition and its "acknowledgement of the authenticity of slaves' voices and memories" (Rushdy, 2004, p. 92). Neo-slave narratives often value the oral tradition, suggesting that lived experiences expressed orally are just as legitimate as literary documents, documented research, and academic scholarship (Rushdy, 2004, p. 92).

Since the publication of *To Be a Slave*, there have been a significant number of noteworthy children's literature texts that have been written as young adult novels in the tradition of the neo-slave narrative. Virginia Hamilton's (1984, 1988) young adult novels *The House of Dies Drear* and *Anthony Burns: The Defeat and Triumph of a Fugitive*



*Slave*, Mary Lyon's (1996) *Letters to a Slave Girl: The Story of Harriet Jacobs*, and Julius Lester's (1972, 1982) *Long Journey Home: Stories From Black History* and *This Strange New Feeling* are young adult novels labeled by critics as neo-slave narratives. These books are considered important because "they made it a point to depict life under slavery from the perspective of the enslaved" (Sims Bishop, 2007, p. 251).

More recent young adult novels such as Noni Carter's (2011) *Good Fortune*, Christopher Paul Curtis's (2007), *Elijah of Buxton*, Tonya Cherie Hegamin's (2014) *Willow* (2014), Nick Lake's (2012) *In Darkness*, Julius Lester's (2005, 2013) *Day of Tears* and *Times Memory*, Malice McGill's (2000) *Miles Song*, Shelby Moses' (2005) *I Dred Scott*, Thaylia Moses' (2004) *Slave Moth*, and Walter Mosley's (2006) *47* might also be read as neo-slave narratives. These young adult novels also focus on the Black experience during slavery.

During the past two decades a significant number of picture books have also followed the tradition of the neo-slave narrative. Veronica Chambers and Paul Lee's (1998) *Amistad Rising*, Catherine Clinton and Shane Evans' (2007) *When Harriet Met Sojourner*, Catherine Clinton and Sean Quall's (2008) *Phillis Big Test*, Monica Edinger and Robert Byrd's (2013) *Africa is My Home: A Child of Amistad*, Deborah Hopkinson and James Ransome's (1993) *Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt*, Laban Carrick Hill and Brian Collier's (2010) *Dave the Potter: Artist, Poet*, Delores Johnson's (1993) *Now Let Me Fly: The Story of a Slave Family*, Ellen Levin and Kadir Nelson's (2007) *Henry's Freedom Box*, Julius Lester's (2005) *The Old African*, Patricia McKissack and Leo and Diane Dillon's (2011) *Never Forgotten*, Lorenzo Pace's (2001) *Jalani and the Lock*, Irene Smalls and Melodye Rosales' (1996) *Irene Jennie and the Christmas Masquerade*:

*The Johnkanus*, and Courtnei Wright and Gershon Griffith's (1994) *Jumping the Broom* are excellent examples of children's books that wed images with text to tell fictional stories of enslavement.

Children's books such as those listed above can be read as neo-slave narratives because they were written in contemporary times and explore various aspects of what it was like to live under slavery. These texts share an intertextual relationship with original slave narratives and "often educate readers about the connection between past and present" (Hinton, 2008). They also adopt many of the conventions of the original slave narratives while revisiting the genre in light of recently published revisionist historiographies about the institution (Hinton, 2008).

This dissertation illustrates that reading neo-slave narratives written for youth offers several opportunities for in-depth studies that focus on the role that intertextuality plays in contemporary the recasting of the institution. It also shows how neo-slave narratives take up and represent the various discourses about slavery that exist in the historiography of the institution.

### **Historical Discourses about Slavery**

It is useful to present the various arguments that have been made by notable historians about slavery because this study explores the intertextual connections between neo-slave narratives written for children and historical scholarship about the institution. I have surveyed noteworthy historical research about the institution and presented it in the paragraphs below.

To begin, when the academic discourse of United States history first began to emerge in the late nineteenth century, slavery was one topic that produced a significant

amount of debate. For instance, the 1890s saw conflicting interpretations of slavery from leading historians James Ford Rhodes (1893) and future president Woodrow Wilson (1892). While both men agreed upon the claim that the Black race was inferior, they disagreed about the nature of slavery in the Americas. Rhodes argued that the institution of slavery was extremely harsh and oppressive, whereas Wilson claimed that American slaves lived in comfortable slave quarters and rarely experienced harsh treatment or punishment. Furthermore, Wilson argued that slavery benefitted Blacks greatly because it served as a civilizing force for the race and helped to integrate Blacks into American societies.

At the start of the twentieth century Wilson's argument gained steam when a group of White historians from the South collectively challenged the notion that slavery had been harsh, oppressive, and exploitative. Historians like the Georgia-born Ulrich B. Phillips (1918) represented slavery as a kind and paternalistic institution that was dedicated to the welfare and advancement of Blacks. Phillips asserted that Black slaves needed guidance because they were inherently lazy, lewd, child-like, docile, and incompetent. In Phillips' presentation of kindly paternalism, White slave owners and overseers were portrayed as being concerned with providing Black slaves with order, discipline, and good health. Phillips portrayed antebellum slaveholders as benevolent masters who cared for their slaves and the plantation as a school that was focused on the civilization of its enslaved pupils. To Phillips, planters molded the allegedly malleable African into a predominant plantation type who was willing to submit to the system of slavery. Phillips' work, which quickly became regarded as a seminal and authoritative

study in the field, also stressed that Black slaves appreciated the paternalistic nature of the institution and were content with their plight in slavery.

While Phillips' assertions were readily accepted at the time by many White Americans and held sway for nearly four decades, there was an interracial group of historians who argued that his representation was wholly inaccurate. Historians like W. E. B. Dubois (1924, 1935, 1939), Carter G. Woodson (1922), and Frederic Bancroft (1931) challenged the idea of a paternalistic slave society and asserted that the representation drawn by Phillips and other early twentieth century White southern historians derived from their racist attitudes and undisguised belief in the inferiority of Blacks. W. E. B. Dubois (1924) and Carter G. Woodson (1924) worked for many years to challenge what they believed was racist propaganda disguised as history which served as ideological justification for the mass enslavement of African people. In and through their historical studies, Dubois and Woodson challenged the notions of Black docility and White paternalism. Dubois and Woodson foregrounded the existence of slave resistance and focused on the cruelty, exploitation, and oppression that defined the institution. Dubois also challenged Phillips' representation of Blacks as inherently lazy, docile, and incompetent by writing about the intelligence, determination, and courage of those who toiled under slavery.

Opposition to the arguments advanced by historians like Phillips continued into the 1930s and 1940s with the publication of studies from historians such as Herbert Aptheker (1943). In his influential *American Negro Slave Revolts*, Aptheker attempted to shatter the idea of the docile and contented slave by writing about the many rebellious acts and revolts that were carried out by Blacks living under slavery. Aptheker also

argued that the myth of the docile and happy Black slave could be dispelled simply by looking at individual acts of resistance which could be found in primary sources. These acts included purposefully damaging tools, working slowly, burning down buildings, running away, and committing acts of violence against Whites.

Although historians like Aptheker challenged and helped to significantly shift the representation of the Black slave in the academy, the depiction of slavery that had been put forth by historians like Phillips remained very much a part of American culture throughout the beginning of the twentieth century. In his study of racist cultural artifacts, David Pilgrim (2005) notes that the representation of the slave put forth by Phillips and other historians could be found throughout American culture during the first half of the twentieth century. He points out that images of the lazy, lewd, docile, and stupid Black slave were abundant in children's books, cartoons, television shows, movies, sheet music, ashtrays, and school text books.

It is partially because of the persistence of the view of Phillips and others that a number of post-World War II historians such as Kenneth Stamp (1956) and John Hope Franklin (1947) conducted studies that attempted to dismiss the idea of quaint and paternalistic slave system by highlighting sources that reveal the brutality of slavery and Black resistance to it. Like Aptheker, Stamp and Franklin argued that resistance to slavery came in many forms. They presented historical research that asserted that Black slaves resisted slavery by stealing, feigning illness, behaving childishly, and shirking responsibilities. Stamp (1956) believed that the perception of Black slave inferiority and incompetence arose in part as a response to these kinds of day-to-day resistance. Franklin (1947) asserted that claims of Black slave inferiority stemmed from other factors. He

indicated that Black slaves wore a mask of docility and ignorance in an attempt to deal with the oppression of slavery. Franklin's work was viewed as groundbreaking in the field because he used sources like the WPA slave narratives to show that Black slaves chose to wear a mask of submissiveness in front of Whites in effort to survive the brutalities of slavery.

With the emergence of a growing body of compelling book-length studies that strongly challenged the claim of the contented slave and the kind and caring slave owner, an increasing number of historians began to read the work of Phillips and others who had made similar claims with a great deal of hostility, contempt, and suspicion. Although the tide of studies that focused on the existence of slave resistance helped to strongly challenge the narrative of the paternalistic slave system and moved it from of its position as one of the dominant discourses in the field, there were historians who still continued to assert the idea of the contented slave. For instance, in his notable study, historian Stanley Elkins (1959) argued that slaves were not only docile and content, but also irresponsible, loyal, lazy, and humble. Elkins rekindled the White antebellum stereotype of the Black slave as stupid, lazy, and contented and attempted to provide reasons for such perceived behavior. Challenging the assertions made by historians like Franklin and Stamp, Elkins asserted that the prevalence of laziness, stupidity, and contentment of Black slaves was due to the oppressive nature of slavery. He also argued that the physical brutality and psychological torture used by slave owners reduced slaves to childlike passivity. Elkins' theory stimulated much discussion and debate about slavery. However, although a small number of Elkins' peers built upon his use of psychological theory and sociological analogy, the number of studies that dismissed Phillips' and Elkin's claims about the

temperament of the Black slave drastically grew during the second half of the twentieth century and early twenty-first century.

During this time historians continued to complete a number of studies that focused on the psychologies of the Black slave. Some of these studies focused on the regional differences in slavery, while others explicitly explored the nature of slave culture and community. Moving beyond the strict dichotomy of paternalism versus resistance, many of these studies shined a spotlight on previously neglected aspects of the institution of slavery by focusing on topics such as family structure, interracial relationships, the slave market, the nature of slave hunting, and the experiences of enslaved women and plantation mistresses. The studies also presented additional analyses about the nature of slave rebellion and resistance. However, similar to the start of the historical study of slavery in the 1890s, historians still remained in disagreement about the nature of the institution and differed in their representation of these particular topics. Since the 1960s, a series of arguments about the topics discussed above dominated the field as historians debated issues such as the extent of slave resistance and the amount of power that White plantation mistresses wielded during slavery. Discussions about the paternalistic nature of slavery also remained a part of the discourse about slavery in the field because of notable historians like Eugene Genovese (1976).

Genovese took up U. B. Phillips' paternalism argument and transformed it in an attempt to discover how slaves themselves shaped their bondage. Genovese argued that paternalism existed, but it was a system in which slaves and masters formed an amazingly organic, if still unequal, relationship. To Phillips, paternalism allowed planters a moral justification for slavery. In this ideology, slaves became part of an extended

family, in which the planter had the duty and obligation to care for them in return for the labor given him by the slaves. He argued that slaves saw in paternalism an implicit acknowledgement of their rights as well as an acknowledgement of their humanity.

However, unlike Phillips, Genovese also wrote about the agency of Black slaves. He argued that by means of calculated accommodation and resistance, slaves were able to create a very limited autonomy for themselves within the paternalistic order. Yet, Genovese noted that resistance was not rebellion. To Genovese, resistance was more often found in acts such as disassembling tools, pretending to misunderstand instructions, or performing work slowly or badly. He pointed out that open resistance under slavery was akin to suicide. Genovese also helped to redefine the definition of Black slave resistance by arguing that it could be seen in the ability of slaves to create their own religion, music, and culture within the plantation system.

Although Genovese's work helped to keep the Phillips concept of paternalism alive in the historiography of slavery, it challenged his assertions of the lazy, child-like, docile, and incompetent slave. Similarly to many other post-1970 historians who took up the issue of slavery, Genovese focused on the culture and community of Black slaves to challenge the ideas that had been set forth by Phillips and Elkins about their incompetence, stupidity, and lack of culture.

In fact, the Elkins' and Phillips' assertion that the peculiar institution had utterly crushed slave culture and rendered slaves psychologically feeble and disturbed was strongly challenged after 1970. Genovese's work was one of a long list of historical studies that challenged the argument of the docile, disturbed, and stupid slave by providing rich details about slave culture and resistance. Actually, throughout the past



thirty years a significant number of historians like John Blassingame (1972), Edward Morgan (1978), and Herbert Gutman (1976) have developed a vivid picture of slave culture and resistance in an effort show that Black slaves differed greatly from the way they were represented in studies by historians like Elkins and Phillips. These post-1970 historians also emphasized significant variations and diversity within American slavery in different regions and at different times. In so doing, they shined a spotlight on previously neglected aspects of slavery, such as the family structure and relationships in slavery, the slave market, the plight of children, experiences of enslaved women and plantation mistresses, and the surprising phenomenon of Black slaveholders.

This is not to suggest, however, that all post-1970 historians agree about slavery. A series of arguments about topics such the psychology of the slave, the nature of the slave community, and the extent of slave resistance and rebellion continues to rage. Nor have the assertions put forth by Elkins and Phillips totally disappeared. Indeed, there are still some historians like John C. Perry (2002) who make the familiar argument that the vast majority of slaves were well fed, well treated, received better medical attention, and worked similar hours to most southern Whites.

The preceding brief survey of the historical academic discourse about slavery is useful as it provides details about the historical scholarship that will be discussed in this study. Specifically, much of the discussion in this dissertation focuses on how competing claims in historical scholarship about the psychology of the Black slave, the conditions of slavery, and the behavior and views of White slave owners is represented in neo-slave narratives written for children.

It is also important to note that in this study I explore the intertextual connections between my text collection and two noteworthy historical studies about slavery that are found in the early historiography of the institution. Specifically, I examine how the books featured in this study engage with and respond to U. B. Phillips and Stanley Elkins' argument about the existence of contented Black slaves and paternalistic White slave masters during the antebellum period.

I chose to read my text collection primarily against the U.B. Phillips and Stanley Elkin's scholarship because they are considered noteworthy works in the historiography of slavery in the United States. The historical studies of U. B. Phillips and Stanley Elkins are noteworthy works in the historiography of slavery that continue to attract scholarly comment, critical evaluation, and have exerted a lasting influence on the study and representation of slavery in the Americas. Furthermore, historians generally agree that the historiography of slavery has been defined and shaped by their landmark studies, which for Phillips was his *American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment and Control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Regime* (1918) and for Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (1959). Because of the representation of slavery that appears in these studies, Phillips and Elkins are considered the most influential historians in establishing patterns of belief about the nature of those who lived under the plantation system in the United States. Their claims about the institution continue to be challenged, supported, and debated about by contemporary writers.

In his studies about slavery, Phillips represented slavery as a kind and paternalistic institution that was dedicated to the welfare and advancement of Blacks. He

argued that Black slaves needed guidance because they were inherently lazy, lewd, childlike, docile, and incompetent. In Phillip's view, White owners and overseers provided Black slaves with adequate food, clothing, housing, medical care, order, discipline, and work training because they could not provide themselves with these things on their own. He argued that slavery had a civilizing effect on Black slaves, who he saw as an inferior race. In a passage of a study where he compares the humanity or human urge to resist oppression of Black slaves on the American plantation to the White slaves of ancient Rome, Phillips noted that, "Negroes for the most part were by racial quality submissive rather than defiant, lighthearted instead of gloomy, ingratiating instead of sullen, and [their] very defects invited paternalism rather than repression" (Phillips, p. 8). This characterization of the Black slave was in many ways a repeat of the common descriptions that existed in American Southern folklore from the Reconstruction period and the late nineteenth century.

Stanley Elkins also continued to represent slaves in a similar manner during the middle of the twentieth century in his historical scholarship about the institution. Elkins argued that the harsh, brutal, oppressive slave system transformed Blacks into docile, irresponsible, childlike dependents. Like Phillips, Elkins represented the same behavioral temperament or personality of the Black slave. He wrote that the typical Black plantation slave was "docile but irresponsible, loyal but lazy, humble but chronologically given to lying and stealing; his behavior full of infantile silliness and his talk inflated with childish exaggeration. His relationship with his master was one of utter dependence and childlike attachment; indeed it was the key to his very being" (Elkins, p. 58).

Phillips' and Elkins' work, which continues to be regarded as formative studies in the field stressed that Blacks were content with their plight in slavery and that they greatly appreciated and benefitted from the institution. Their work is considered groundbreaking because they explicitly considered power and race relations in their examination of slavery. Their studies also have significantly contributed to later representations of slavery by historians and other writers. Contemporary historians continue to reference Phillips and Elkins in their studies about the behavior of Black slaves and White masters. Their claims have endured in many of contemporary historical debates about the institution.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

Because some of the terms used in this study may be unfamiliar to readers I have included a list of definitions of key terms below. The meanings of certain terms can vary depending on the context, conceptual framework, or field of study so the list will be useful in orienting readers regarding how I use these terms in this dissertation. It will also help readers to negotiate their understanding of this work.

**African American** - African American refers to people who live in the United States and who share a biological and cultural heritage with origins in Africa. African American is used interchangeably with the term 'Black' in this dissertation. It also is important to note that I have chosen to capitalize the word Black because here it constitutes a specific cultural group. I have also capitalized this term as a matter of respect for this group.

**Bleed** - An illustration is refereed to as a bleed when it extends to the very edge of a page, with no white space or border. When an illustration extends to all four edges of the page, it is called a full bleed.

**Children's Literature** - Children's literature is a distinction used for both fiction and nonfiction books that are written primarily for children under age eighteen. This broad definition is used throughout this study.

**Class** – Class is a social constructed status hierarchy in which individuals and groups are classified on the basis of esteem and prestige that is acquired mainly through economic success and accumulation of wealth.

**Double-Page Spread** - A double-page spread is an illustration that covers two pages of a picture book.

**End pages** - End pages are the first pages one sees when opening a picture book and the last pages one sees before closing it. End pages are like stage curtains that frame the performance within a picture book.

**Epitext** - Epitext is the term for anything associated with a picture book found outside the book itself.

**Gender** – Gender refers to the array of socially constructed roles and relationships, personality traits, attitudes, behaviors, values, relative power and influence that society ascribes to the two sexes on a differential basis

**Historical Discourse** - Historical discourse is the formal discussion of history in speech or writing. This discussion may take place in a conversation or in texts such as dissertations, treatises, sermons, articles, or critical research studies. It is also defined as the critical scholarship and studies about history.

**Historical Fiction** - Historical fiction is a distinct genre consisting of imaginative stories grounded in historical discourses. Historical fiction draws on historical discourses to create an imagined story that could have possibly taken place in the past. The setting is

usually real and drawn from history and often contains actual historical persons, but the main characters tend to be fictional. Writers of stories in this genre, while penning fiction, attempt to capture the manners and social conditions of the persons or time(s) presented in the story with much attention paid to period detail and fidelity. Historical fiction has also been defined as a distinct genre consisting of imaginative stories grounded in facts from the past.

**Historiography** - Historiography is the writing of history that is based on the critical examination of sources, the selection of particulars from authentic materials, and the synthesis of particulars into a narrative that is focused on a particular topic and will stand the test of critical methods.

**Medium** - Medium refers to the types of paints and other materials the illustrator uses to produce visual images or illustrations.

**Multicultural children's literature** - Multicultural children's literature focuses on the experiences of those groups who have been historically underrepresented in the world of children's literature. Historically, the five main cultural groups include African American, Latinas/os, Asian American, Native American, and Jewish (Bigler, 2005).

**Neo-slave Narratives** - Neo-slave narrative is a common label used to describe contemporary fictional texts about slavery written since the 1960s. In this study, the term is also used interchangeably with children and young adult literature about slavery.

**Picture Book** - A picture book usually consists of 32 pages and contains illustrations that are an integral part of the story. In picture books a combination of words and pictures is essential to constructing the story line.

**Point of View** - Point of view refers to the perspective that words and illustrations create for the readers, placing them in certain positions in relation to the scene in the illustration or the story characters and events. The books in this study employ two types of point of view. The writers use first person point of view in some of the texts. In first person point of view the story is narrated by one character at a time. First person can be recognized by the use of 'I' or 'we'. In first person, readers only see the point of view of one character. While this character may share details about others in the story, readers are presented with only what the speaker knows. In the other picture books featured in this study the third-person point to present their narratives about slavery. Third person point of view is a form of storytelling in which a narrator relates all action in third person. The narrator seems to be someone standing outside the story referring to all the characters by name or as *he*, *she*, *they*, and so on. The narrator reports all speech and action.

**Race** - A socially constructed category that has been created to differentiate groups of people.

**Racism** - Racism is the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others. It system of ignorance, exploitation, and power used to oppress African Americas, Asian Americans, Latinas/os, Native Americans, Pacific Americans, and other people on the basis of ethnicity, culture, skin, color, and facial features.

**White** - White refers to people who live in the United States and who share a biological and cultural heritage with origins in Europe. I have chosen to capitalize White because, for the purposes of this study, they are viewed as a specific social group and as a matter of respect for the group.

**Young Adult Literature (YA)** - Literature that features protagonists from ages twelve to eighteen and is marketed to readers in this age range. Throughout this study children's literature and young adult literature is used interchangeably.

### **Summary of Dissertation Chapters**

This summary highlights the principal points of discussion found in this dissertation. The first chapter describes the purpose and significance of this study. It also presents the primary research questions, limitations of the study, a survey of historical discourses about slavery, details about my background, a discussion about neo-slave narratives and historical discourses about slavery, a summary of dissertation chapters, and definitions of key terms.

The second chapter features a literature review that is organized into three sections and focuses on multicultural children's literature, African American children's literature, and scholarship about neo-slave narratives written for children. The chapter also includes a discussion about the theoretical framework used for this study. In this discussion I present my rationale for using a framework that draws on critical race theory, critical race feminism, critical race feminism, critical multicultural analysis, and intertextuality.

The third chapter outlines the methodological approach used in this dissertation. In this chapter I write about the method, which draws on critical race theory, critical race feminism, and critical multicultural analysis to explore how race, class, and gender are rendered in picture books featured in this study. The chapter turns outlines the analytic techniques that are used to analyze the illustrations that appear in the picture books in my



text collection. To conclude, the chapter then focuses on the genre of historical fiction, book selection, trustworthiness, and the limitations of this study.

Chapter 4 contains an analysis of the data that features intertextual analysis. In this analysis I explore how these texts engage with the historical discourses of the contented slave. I focus on how the picture books engage with the early historical studies about slavery that asserted that Blacks slaves were contented and that there were paternalistic slave masters. Chapter 4 also presents an exploration of how race, gender, and class are represented in the picture books featured in this study. I also focus on how power is rendered in these texts.

Chapter 4 also incorporates the analysis of the illustrations in my text collection. I examine how these illustrations engage with and respond to the historiography of slavery. In particular, I analyze how illustrations in Ntozanke Shange's (2012) *Freedom's a-Callin me*, Kadir Nelson's (2011) *Heart and Soul: the Story of African Americans*, Cythia Grady's (2011) *I lay my Stitches Down*, Joseph Slate's (2009) *I Want to be Free*, Patricia Polacco's (2009) *January's Sparrow*, Carole Weatherford Boston's (2006) *Moses: When Harriet Tubman led her People to Freedom*, Elisa Carbone's (2008) *Night Running*, Jacqueline Woodson's (2005) *Show way*, and Andrea Davis Pinkney's (2009) *Sojourner Truth's Step-Stomp Stride* to understand how contemporary children's picture books represent race, class, and gender and illustrate, supplement, and recast particular historical discourses about the slavery.

Chapter 5 includes a summary and discussion of my findings, recommendations for further research, and consideration of the sociopolitical and pedagogical implications of this study. In this chapter I also advocate for reading neo-slave narratives against

historical studies about slavery and argue that these picture books can play a significant role in facilitating student understanding of diverse discourses found in the historiography of the institution.

## CHAPTER II

### A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

*“Whether we like it or not, whether we intend it or not, what children read or what is read to them will influence their world view”*

- N. Shomoossi (2007)

This literature review documents and analyzes the development of the scholarship about fictional children’s books about slavery. Because many of the assertions found in this small body of scholarship draw significantly from a larger body of research about multicultural and African American children’s literature, I have chosen to incorporate studies from both areas in this review. This literature review will illuminate claims that are continuously made in research studies about multicultural and African American children’s literature. It will also reveal much about the body of research related to children’s literature that represents slavery.

All three bodies of research literature discussed in this chapter contain a significant number of critical studies that focus on representation of the Black characters in children’s books. Many of these studies take up the issue of the empowerment of young Black readers. While others foreground the role that historical and sociopolitical context has played in shaping how children’s literature that features Black characters is created, read, reviewed, and received by young readers and adults alike.

In essence, this literature review includes multicultural and African American children’s scholarship because it is relevant to an understanding of the scholarship about fictional children’s books about slavery. Many of the research studies about these children’s and young adult literature about slavery draw upon and continue to make

claims that have been made by scholars about the importance of African American and multicultural literature. Although the review of the literature about African American and multicultural literature does not primarily focus on children's texts about slavery, it is also important to include both here because much of the current scholarship about children's books about slavery is part of the rich and larger body of African American and multicultural literature research that focuses on the representation of Blacks in children's books.

This literature review begins with an examination of the research on the importance of multicultural literature, then moves to an exploration of African American children's literature research that focuses on stereotypes, self-esteem, and the changing images of the Black character, and then considers studies that examine the representation of slavery in children's and young adult books about slavery.

### **The Importance of Multicultural Children's Literature**

For close to a century the importance of exposing young readers in the United States to multicultural literature has been a focus for many individuals who have been concerned with the complex nature of race relations in the United States. During this time a significant number of social justice activists, educators, and scholars have argued that multicultural literature is important. They have asserted that it is important because it helps children appreciate and identify with their own culture, provides young people with opportunities to gain a broader understanding of the diverse cultures throughout the country and opens the dialogue on issues regarding diversity.

Thandeka Chapman (2004) points out that the call for multicultural literature for young readers in the United States began with the Garveyism movement in the 1920s. By

using primary source materials from the United Negro Improvement Association, which was founded by Marcus Garvey in 1914, Chapman makes the case that this was the first U.S. organization to advocate for the use of multicultural literature as a means to cultivate racial pride among children of African descent. Chapman notes that because the United Negro Improvement Association did not believe that the greater society could properly educate children of African descent, so it attempted to provide academic resources for them. Through teaching, activities, and literature the organization sought to bring a sense of pride to children of African ancestry living in the United States. Chapman also points out that at a time when children of African descent were being told that their cranium size, skin color, position in society, and culture made them inferior to Whites, the United Negro Improvement Association felt that it was imperative to provide children of African ancestry with literature having to do with the histories, cultures, and stories of their ancestors. They felt that providing children with knowledge that reflected their culture and ancestry was an important way to promote racial pride among children of African descent. It was also a way to help them cope with the negative stereotypes about their race and discrimination in the United States.

To Chapman, the examination of the Universal Negro Improvement Association's focus on multicultural literature as a means to help children of African ancestry value themselves provides scholars and educators with an important insight into how organizations shaped the early discourse around the importance of multicultural literature. Chapman's article highlights the important role that the sociopolitical climate played in shaping the early conversations, writings, and scholarship about multicultural literature. Following the United Negro Improvement Association's initial push to provide

multicultural literature for children of African descent, throughout the first part of the twentieth century most of the commentary about the importance of multicultural literature in the United States centered on the role that these books could play, countering the negative stereotypes about Blacks as well as other people of color.

Rudine Sims Bishop (2007) has also focused on the role that the sociopolitical climate of the early twentieth century played in shaping the conversation about multicultural literature. Bishop points out that by 1940 a number of social justice activists, educators, and school administrators were having meaningful conversations about the role that multicultural literature could play in helping children of color contend with the divisive racial issues that existed in the United States at the time. To provide evidence for this claim, she highlights the intercultural educational movement. This movement aimed to decrease tensions among racial and ethnic groups and raise the self-esteem of minorities. Bishop points out that the movement began in 1934 with the founding of The Service Bureau for Intercultural Education in Human Relations in New York. Founded by Rachel Davis Dubois, a female social justice activist who was keenly interested in intercultural and interracial affairs, the bureau was designed to help teachers set up programs in intercultural education programs in their schools. Initially concerned with assimilating new immigrants, the agency's focus quickly shifted to race relations because of the outbreak of race riots in a number of cities throughout the United States in the 1940s. Bishop notes that the riots led to a flurry of interest in interracial relations and an increased emphasis in the field of education about the important role that positive multicultural children's literature could play in helping to enhancing the curriculum in school in the United States. Furthermore, she points out that throughout the 1940s and

1950s the Service Bureau for Intercultural Education also focused on strongly advocating for the use of multicultural children's literature in schools to improve race relations in the United States over time.

Although the Service Bureau for Intercultural Education was not the only organization that attempted to deal with the racial problems in America at the time, Bishop highlights the bureau in her research because its members were promoting the use of multicultural education as a way to deal with the complex issues of racial oppression in the United States. Bishop argues that the history of the bureau shows how the importance of children's books about people of color was slowly coming into focus in the 1940s and 1950s (Sims Bishop, 2007) and notes that the bureau's work marks an important and instrumental time regarding the fight for the creation and use of multicultural literature with young readers.

Even though organizations like United Negro Association and the Service Bureau for Intercultural Affairs strongly advocated for the use of multicultural literature to help remedy the racial problems United States of early part of the twentieth century, their message only caught the attention of a limited number of individuals. It was not until the publication of Nancy Larrick's landmark article "The All White World of Children's Books" in 1965 in *The Saturday Review* that the argument about the importance of multicultural literature really caught the attention of the American public (Sims Bishop, 2007 p. 84). In Larrick's article she identified, through a study that consisted of five thousand books published in the early 1960s, that people of color rarely appeared in children's books in the United States. Larrick referred to the phenomenon as White

supremacy in children's literature and called the situation one of the most critical issues in American education.

Like the members of the United Negro Improvement Association and the Service Bureau for Intercultural affairs, Larrick believed that children's literature could play an important role in helping to diminish racism and improve race relations across the United States. She wrote that "although his light skin makes him one of the world's minorities, the white child learns from his books that he is the kingfish [and] there seems to be little chance of developing the humility so urgently needed for cooperation [in the world] as long as children are brought up on gentle doses of racism through their books" (Larrick, 1965, p. 2). Larrick believed that the remedy to this problem was the publication of more multicultural literature.

Because Larrick strongly believed in the importance of multicultural literature and was concerned about the limited number of these books that were published during her time, she helped to found the Council on Interracial Books for Children in 1965, which was an organization that vigorously encouraged the writing, production, and effective distribution of books about nonwhite children. Like the Service Bureau for Intercultural Affairs, the council saw multicultural literature as a way to improve interracial relationships. The council also worked to promote the work of writers and artists of color and attempted to help them gain access to the publishing industry. This attempt to help writers gain access to the publishing industry was based on the belief that multicultural literature needed to be written by people of color in order for it to be authentic. Acting on this belief the council sponsored contests for writers of color that ended with the submission of winning manuscripts to children's book publishers. Many



scholars have argued that Nancy Larrick's work had a profound influence on the discourse about the importance of multicultural literature because it caused a significant number of publishing company editors, educators, librarians, scholars and writers to join the conversation about this topic (Bader, 2003; Sims Bishop, 2007).

Since Larrick's article was published there has been much debate in the scholarly world about the importance of multicultural literature. Since the publication of her groundbreaking article many scholars have taken up this issue. Some have written about the impact that multicultural literature has on the way children feel about their culture, while others have attempted to point out why it is imperative to have these types of books in schools. For instance, Chall, Radwin, French, and Hall (1979) replicated Larrick's study to see if the way in which African American children were represented in children's books had changed since Larrick published her article in 1965. They found that although the amount of books that featured Black characters between 1965 and 1976 had doubled, the quality of these works was suspect. They argued that this trend was shaped by the factor that most of these works were produced by White writers and illustrators. Chall, Radwin, French, and Hall also felt that the best way to improve the quality of these types of children's books was to further encourage and recognize talented writers from various minority groups to create children's literature about their own authentic experiences. They also argued that this is important because it influences the way children view themselves and others. They wrote that by "providing authentic depictions of various cultures and life styles, multicultural books can help children gain a more realistic picture of the world they live in" (Chall, Radwin, French, Hall, 1979 p. 528).

Since the publication of their study a continuously growing group of scholars have made assertions that are similar to Chall, Radwin, French, and Hall. For instance, Sims Bishop (1982) made similar claims when she wrote the noteworthy *Shadow and Substance: African American Experience in Contemporary Children's Fiction*. In her book Sims Bishop (1982) used the metaphor of “ windows and mirrors” to make the argument that children need to read books which not only allow them to see through the window of books to the world around them, but also to see themselves mirrored in texts with which they came in contact. Masha Kabakow Rudman (1995) has also asserted that multicultural literature helps young people value the diversity of others. She points out that learning about the history and heritage of others is an important part of helping young people to be tolerant of cultural differences. Sonia Nieto (2000) has also made the argument about the importance of multicultural literature. According to Nieto, incorporating multicultural literature into the curriculum of schools is vital. She argues that the inclusion of books about people of color leads to an acknowledgement of the importance of cultural and racial diversity and that the exclusion of such books is a form of unintentional discrimination.

Jacque Roethler (1998) has also written about the need for more multicultural literature in schools. She contends that the absence of positive images about minority cultures in children's picture books in schools has damaging effects on minority children. She writes that if minority groups like “African American children don't really see themselves in any of the illustrations in the picture books that they read then they won't be able to judge their place in society” (p. 25). According to Roethler, if minority children do not see faces like their own in places like hospitals, courthouses, department

stores, and in the children's literature in their school they "may come to the conclusion that the best thing to do is to live vicariously through whites, thus denying their rich culture as African Americans. She also adds that "moreover, they may come to see themselves as surrogate Whites" (p. 25). Hefflin and Barksdale-Ladd (2001) have also written that when literature offers children a view of their own cultural surroundings it helps them to better understand their cultural context and they can find support for the process of defining themselves as individuals and understanding and developing their roles within their family, communities, and the world.

Beyond the argument that it is important to place multicultural literature in the hands of children, a number of scholars since the 1970s have attempted to explore in depth the issue of quality in these types of books. For instance, Temple, Martinez, Yokota, and Naylor (2002) have written about the issue of cultural specificity in multicultural children's literature. They argue that there are different degrees of cultural specificity and that it determines the quality of these types of works. At one end of the continuum of cultural specificity there are books that just touch the surface of a particular group's culture by solely including characters to provide more diversity in illustrations and not showing the particular culture in the text. Temple, Martinez, Yokota, and Naylor point out that these books are less than ideal forms of multicultural literature because they do not provide enough cultural details. In their study they argue for the need for educators to recognize and use more books on the other end of the continuum. To Temple, Martinez, Yokota, and Naylor these books have a high level of cultural specificity because they provide many authentic representations of the customs, beliefs, experiences, expectations of a specific group of people.

Rudine Sims Bishop (1993) has also written about the issue of quality multicultural literature. She points out that some of these books are just generically American, which means the theme in the text is generic to any culture. According to Sims Bishop, these books may provide children with illustration of characters who look like individuals from a particular multicultural group, but they provide no cultural substance. Sims Bishop points out that the quality of these books is suspect because only the illustrations indicate the racial identity of the characters, but that identity does not influence or shape the story line. However, Sims Bishop asserts that there are multicultural children's texts where many specific details about the culture of a specific group are revealed and cultural substance is woven into the setting, plot, actions, and words of the characters and the theme of the book. According to Sims Bishop, these culturally specific children's books incorporate language styles and patterns, religious beliefs and practices, family configurations, social mores, attitudes, and values shared by members of the cultural group.

Some scholars have suggested that the culturally specific multicultural literature that Rudine Sims Bishop has written about is important because it demonstrates the connections that exist between race, culture, and unequal distribution of power (Yokota, 1993; Cai Bishop, 1994; Ching, 2005; Harris, 2003; Woodson, 2003). For instance, Stuart Ching (2005) contends that the intersection of race, violence, and power is frequently ignored in children's books. He argues that good multicultural literature should not only provide cultural substance and advocate the inclusion of all cultures but also bring the distribution and exercise of power to readers' attention. To Ching, books that address

such issues are important because they help young readers to recognize and think critically about major issues that shape their daily lives.

Ching highlights Eve Bunting's *Smoky Night* as an example of how some writers avoid dealing with the impact of power in multicultural literature for children. *Smoky Night* is about the Los Angeles riots that took place in 1992 after the police beating of Rodney King. In his analysis of the text, Ching points out that because Bunting is not African American and does not live in Los Angeles she wrote as a cultural outsider which led to her failure to acknowledge in the text that the riots were a response to the injustice committed by those in power against those who lacked power.

The concerns that Ching has with Bunting's writing is an example of the insider-outsider. Currently, the insider-outsider debate is one of the most contentious issues in the field of multicultural children's literature. The debate is not a mere discussion limited to the criteria for determining quality multicultural literature, but is also about the issues such as creative freedom and the role that an author's culture and heritage plays in their ability to write culturally specific books for children that are authentic. Most of the scholars who have been involved in this debate about cultural authenticity have focused on who has the right to create multicultural literature for children (Aronson, 2003; Ching, 2005; Fox & Short, 2003; Lasky, 2003; Mikkelsen, 1998; Temple, Martinez, Yokota, & Naylor 2002; Woodson, 2003).

To Harris (1993) and Sims Bishop (1993), someone creating multicultural literature from an insider perspective presents a cultural group from the point of view of a person within the group that is being presented in the work. According to Harris and Sims Bishop, these individuals are more likely to portray what members of the group think

about themselves. They point out that multicultural literature that is based on personal experiences within a particular culture is more likely to be presented authentically. They claim that when insiders create stories they present a wide array of cultural experiences. Sims Bishop (1993) notes that multicultural children's literature created by someone from outside of the culture that is being presented in these types of books is quite different from those that are produce by insiders. To Sims Bishop (1993) and Temple (2002), even when a story written from an outsider's perspective provides accurate details it lacks the cultural nuances to make it come alive. Furthermore, Sims Bishop (1993) believes that there is a strong tendency for creators of multicultural literature who are outsiders to misrepresent, distort, or produce racist points of views about the culture that they are attempting to present in their work.

Cultural authenticity in children's literature is such a complicated and complex issue that editors Kathy Short and Dana Fox (2003) made a decision to explore the issue by compiling a collection of essays on the topic in a scholarly text. In the book titled *Stories Matter: The Complexity of Cultural Authenticity*, Short and Fox point out that although it is important to explore the connection between an author's culture and the literature that they create, the discussion of cultural authenticity extends far beyond that issue. Short and Fox claim that some of the most heated debates relate to the connection between the insider/outsider binary and cultural authenticity. One aspect of this debate relates to the content that outsiders include when they create a story about a group with whom they have limited or no experience. Scholars such as Jacque Roethler and Thelma Soto (2003) argue that too often the images, themes, and values of a cultural group in

multicultural books created by outside authors and illustrators are not valued by the cultural group's members.

Jacque Roethler (1998) asserts that because outsiders who illustrate multicultural literature are unaware of the nuances of a particular culture they may unintentionally communicate their prejudices in their books by including images that may be offensive. To Roethler, because children soak up these prejudices, which usually remain with them for the rest of their lives, these books serve as a tool for the continuation of cultural misunderstandings and discrimination. Sims Bishop (2003) suggests that for outsiders to avoid this problem they need to make a deliberate effort to understand the cultural perspectives of the people they plan to represent in their books. She believes that they need to "devote serious and informed critical attention to the literature produced by writers from parallel cultural groups" (p. 29). She also advocates for the careful examination of multicultural children's literature by well-known, highly respected and skilled writers and illustrators from the culture central to the story.

According to Sims Bishop, if one of the goals of multicultural literature is to transmit cultural history, beliefs, and values it seems reasonable to expect or demand that such texts will be written by insiders. To Sims Bishop insiders are people who know a culture intimately or are most aware of what it is like to be a member of a particular group that is depicted in multicultural literature. Sims Bishop also believes that although multicultural literature written by outsiders may present illustrations portraying specific cultures, they rarely contain detailed cultural content in the text. She goes on to note that accordingly, the inclusion of such books on multicultural literature lists for children

complicates the task that educators face when they are charged with choosing quality multicultural literature for the classroom.

The claims referenced above have led to questions and heated debate about the connection between cultural authenticity and authorship. Can writers and illustrators rely on their creativity and imagination to accurately capture the experience of another culture? Kathryn Lasky (2003) argues that the attempt to censor literary works based solely on questions of authenticity can be very problematic. To Lasky, the attempt to curtail authorial freedom can at its worst “ represent a kind of literary version of ethnic cleansing” (p. 88) because she believes that Whites may and have been excluded from creating children’s texts about people of color. She believes that over the past few decades the fanatical adherence to cultural authenticity has created “self-styled militias of cultural diversity” (p. 101) that strongly censor and oppose the works of those they refer to as outsiders.

Hazel Rochman (2003) has also made similar claims. Rochman believes that there is a type of apartheid that has developed due to the demands that only an insider can write about their culture group. She argues that just because a person is from a particular cultural group does not mean that the book is automatically good or authentic and implies that when “writers are prescribed to write the ‘model’ book about a culture it can come at the expense of literary excellence” (pp. 104-105). To Lasky and Rochman, the issue of cultural authenticity in multicultural literature has done much to limit the evolution, creativity, and variety within this literary category. In sharp contrast to Lasky and Rochman, Mingshui Cai (1998, 2002, 2003) argues that cultural authenticity should be the main criterion for evaluating multicultural literature. He notes that with multicultural



literature there is too much at stake to foreground issues such as creativity and literary freedom over cultural authenticity. To Cai, because the misrepresentation of reality can perpetuate ignorance and bias among young readers it is critically important for multicultural texts to be culturally authentic. According to Cai, the purpose of multicultural literature is to present accurate portrayals of people of color so that long held negative stereotypes and myths about them are dispelled.

Furthermore, Sims Bishop (2007) and Cai (2003) argue that the creation of authentic multicultural literature is very important because the histories, beliefs, and values have historically been misrepresented, marginalized, or nonexistent in the world of children's literature. To Sims Bishop and Cai, since children's literature has historically not represented people of color, there is a great need for the group to be accurately represented. Elizabeth Noll (2003) agrees and argues that people of color want to see authentic and positive representations of themselves in children's books to instill pride and to counteract the harmful effects of stereotypical representations. Noll also cautions that although there are a number of authentic multicultural children's texts being created, there are far too many that are published that present stereotypical, demeaning, inaccurate, and unrealistic representations of people of color. She blames the problem on the reality that too many outsiders continue to write about cultures that they do not truly know or understand. Thelma Seto (2003) agrees with Noll and strongly condemns the act of outsiders producing multicultural literature. She believes this can be considered cultural theft. According to Seto, for a person to accurately represent a culture in book they must directly experience or participate in it. Similarly, Cai (2002) has also noted

that cultural boundaries can pose a serious challenge to outsiders who try to write about culture other than their own.

The insider-outside debate described above has caused to me to reflect on the children's literature about slavery that I have been examining for my dissertation. As part of the large body of multicultural literature, where do these texts fit in this debate about cultural authenticity? If we consider arguments put forth by scholars like Seto and Cai, how do we determine cultural authenticity in these texts? How do we judge who are the insiders and outsiders? Is there a difference between White- and Black-authored texts? While I agree with Cai and Sims Bishop (2003) that the debate needs to be seen in the context of people of color fighting for the right to produce and have accurate representation of themselves in children's literature, I believe children's books about slavery call into question the assertion that there is clarity about the classification of insiders and outsiders and the quality and authenticity of their work.

For instance, how do we determine who the insiders or outsiders are regarding these books since none of the individuals who are creating these works about it have directly experienced slavery? Currently, it appears that scholars have avoided taking up this issue. While much of the research about children's books and slavery mirrors and borrows from the scholarship put forth by scholars who argue about the necessity for authentic multicultural literature created by insiders, there have been few attempts made to explore beyond the narrow assertion that authentic books about slavery written by Blacks are important because it empowers the young Black readers and appropriately educates White readers.

This narrow focus has led to the existence of limited scholarship about how cultural authenticity can be determined in this sub-genre of books. Additionally, although it has not been explicitly noted, it appears that some scholars readily accept the authenticity of contemporary children's books about slavery that have been created by Blacks and have often challenged it in texts created by Whites (Bingham, 1970; Jones, 1971; Latimer, 1973; Moore, 1985; Banfield, 1987). Furthermore, rarely is research done about the children's books about slavery created by Whites. To me, determining the authenticity of a children's book about slavery is complex and certainly demands more attention.

### **The History of African American Children's Literature**

African Americans have been represented in children's books since the seventeenth century, but they did not appear in children's literature written by African Americans until the late nineteenth century (Broderick, 1973; Harris, 1990; Johnson & Mongo, 2004; Sims, 1982). Although there were a few African American writers who published children's stories with African American characters in newspapers and periodicals like the *Freedom Journal*, *Christian Recorder*, and the *Brownies Book magazines* in the early 1900s, it was not until the second half of the twentieth century that the number of children's books published by African American writers began to significantly increase.

Some researchers have argued that this increase was due in part to a climate of African American empowerment that was fostered and encouraged by the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s (Larrick, 1965; Sims Bishop, 2007). However, not only was there a significant increase in the number of books published by and about African Americans

during this time, but the manner in which they were portrayed also changed. Before the middle of the twentieth century, most of the children's literature about African Americans contained both implicit and explicit racist messages (Sims Bishop, 2007).

For example, books like *The Ten Little Niggers* (1860, 1939), a counting book that focuses on teaching children to count backward, was filled with explicit racist content that negatively represented Blacks. In *Ten Little Niggers* African American boys are gruesomely killed one by one from incidents that range from being cut in half while chopping wood to death at the paws of a bear. Throughout the nineteenth century many versions of this text appeared with Black boys who were illustrated with dark black skin, bulging eyes, and very thick lips.

Martin (2004) argues that the popularity of children's books like *Ten Little Niggers* reveals how entrenched stereotypes about Black people were to the fabric of white society in the 1900s. To scholars like Martin many children's stories published in the nineteenth century, like *Ten Little Niggers* (1860, 1939), *Diddie, Dumps, and Tot* (1910, 1963), and *Coon Alphabet* (1898), show that racist portrayals of African Americans were prevalent and widely accepted in the world of children's literature during that time. In her textual analysis of early twentieth century children's literature Jonda McNair (2008) noted that books like *Diddie, Dumps, and Tot* were filled with derogatory terms such as nigger, pickaninny, mammy, uncle, auntie, darkey, and coon and were represented as superstitious, happy-go-lucky, and lazy people with bizarre names, who used big words they did not understand. To McNair, who draws on critical race theory, these portrayals gave Whites a psychological sense of superiority and "affirmed and provided ideological

support for the misconception that Blacks are inferior and contented with their treatment as second class citizens” (p. 9).

Violet Harris (1990) and Rudine Sims Bishop (2007) argue that African American children’s literature emerged in the twentieth century to counter the racist depictions of Blacks that were prevalent in these nineteenth century children’s books. They believe that because the racist depictions remained a part of the United States culture through stories, cartoons, and poems into the twentieth century African American writers and illustrators attempted to create children’s books that challenged these representations and helped Black children “to see themselves as normal and recognize their own potential” (Sims Bishop, p. 23).

An excellent example of this was seen in the publication of the *Brownies’ Book magazines*. Launched in 1920 under the guidance of W. E. B. Du Bois, the *Brownies’ Book* was marketed as a magazine for African American families to read and discuss with their children. The *Brownies’ Book magazines* sold for one dollar a year or ten cents a copy and were edited by Jessie Fauset, a female African American writer. The *Brownies’ Book magazines* provided historical information about African Americans and their fictional stories, poetry, achievements, photographs, news, and games.

Written specifically for African American children, who Du Bois affectionately referred to as the ‘children of the sun’, the goals of the magazine were:

1. To make colored children realize that being Black is a normal and beautiful thing.
2. To make them familiar with the history and achievements of the Black race.
3. To make them know that other Black children have grown into beautiful, useful, and famous persons.

4. To teach them delicately a code of honor and action in their relationships with white children.
5. To turn their little hurts and resentments into emulation, ambition, and love of their homes and companions.
6. To point out the best amusements and joys and worthwhile things of life.
7. To inspire them to prepare for definite occupations and duties with a broad spirit of sacrifice.

(Sims Bishop, 2007, p. 23)

Some children's literature scholars who have drawn on critical race theory have pointed out that the *Brownies' Book* not only made a major contribution to the African American community, but it also serves as an example of the role that early African American children's literature played in attempting to contribute to social change (Harris, 1990; Johnson-Feelings, 1996; McNair, 2006; Smith, 2004). To its creators the *Brownies' Book* was viewed as a vehicle for social uplift that sought to achieve its goal by targeting the young. The creators attempted to achieve this goal by publishing works in the magazine that aimed to counter the effects of racism, foster racial pride, and to oppose prevailing negative images and stereotypes of Black people.

Sims Bishop (2007) has pointed out that even though the *Brownies' Book* magazines only lasted for two years, its significance was that it affirmed the need for a distinctive African American children's literature that focused on the empowerment of African American youth. To Sims Bishop (2007), the magazine provided a model for what this body of literature might be like and articulated it through an expressed mission of empowerment for African American youth that constituted a foundation on which contemporary African American children's literature would be built.

Although the *Brownies' Book magazines* are considered groundbreaking because they began the difficult work of creating literature for African American children that counters racist stereotypes and fosters racial pride, its tenure was short lived and it took some time before a steady stream of texts with similar goals were published. Sims Bishop points out that between 1935 and 1965 there were few children's texts that attempted to achieve the same goals as the *Brownies' Book magazines*. She notes that most of the children's books that featured Blacks during this period continued to contain many negative stereotypes.

Although by the 1930s a wide variety of diverse children's books were published by American publishers, those that featured African Americans were limited to stories about life on farms and plantations (Birtha, 1998). Even though it was close to a century since slavery had ended, the stereotypes about slaves discussed in the previous section were continually represented in these works. According to Jesse Birtha, from the 1930s to the 1950s, Blacks in children's books were continuously portrayed negatively. Birtha believes that this was because a number of White children's literature writers and illustrators attempted to create stories about Black experiences, but their lack of interactions with Blacks hindered them from writing authentic or convincing stories.

Rudine Sims Bishop (2007) also notes that during this time demeaning stereotypes about Blacks often made their way into children's books created by Whites. She points out that in children's books like *Frawg* by Annie Vaughn Weaver (1930) there were many derogatory stereotypes about Blacks. *Frawg* is a story about the exploits of a Black boy and his family on an Alabama plantation that is filled with many offensive representations of Black life and culture.

To begin with, the book opens with an image of *Frawg* eating a watermelon. This image sets the tone for series of comical adventures in which the humor is derived from the mockery of Blacks. Throughout the book Frawg and the members of his family are characterized as lazy, mischievous, comical, and not too bright. To support the validity of these characterizations, *Frawg* includes an afterword by the author of *The Story of Doctor Dolittle*, Hugh Lofting. In this afterword Lofting vouches for Weaver's representation of Blacks by noting that she is an authority on Black culture and points out that she really knows "colored people" because she was brought up among them.

Another book published in the 1930s that serves as an example of the existence of demeaning characterizations of Blacks in children's books during this time is *Narcissus an' de Chillun: Final Adventures of Those Plummer Children* (1938) by Christine Noble Govan. *Narcissus an' de Chillun: Final Adventures of Those Plummer Children* (1938) is replete with racist stereotypes about Blacks. The story focuses on Narcissus, the mother of twins named Sears and Roebuck, who is an obedient servant who is charged with the task of taking care of a White family. Throughout the book there are numerous stereotypes. On the title page of this book there is a picture of a 'pickaninny' running barefoot and throughout the text the Black characters are continuously represented as comical, fearful, and simple. Throughout the book they are shown flashing bright white teeth, using big words they cannot pronounce, and are ultra excited and appreciative to be in the presence of White people. In her introduction Govan attempts to give credence to her representation of Blacks by claiming that she has special knowledge of the group. She states:



Here I have given readers a good idea of the Negroes of that time and how we felt towards them, their stories and doings, their laughter and quarrels, their praise, and their scoldings were as much a part of our lives as the food we ate. They took great pride in us and only scolded us for our own good. Each one wanted her, white folks chillun to shine their best. Like the simple times we had outdoors, the kindly old darkies are dying out. Their patience and service will never be forgotten by those who knew them, and I wanted my children to see as I did. (xii)

Although Jesse Birta (1998) dates this phenomenon of White writers and illustrators creating children's books filled with stereotypes as one that ends by 1950, Rudine Sims Bishop (2007) notes such overtly racist characterizations contained in books like Govan's continued well into the late 1950s. She points out that throughout the first part of the twentieth century American children were repeatedly presented with children's books that represented Blacks as objects to be ridiculed and disparaged. She points to *Stories of Little Brown Koko* by Blanche Seale Hunt (1951) as an example of this phenomenon. In the book, Koko, a little country Black boy who lives on a farm is represented as character to be ridiculed and laughed at by readers. He is represented as an eye rolling, bug-eyed, head scratching, big lipped, mischievous child who speaks in a seemingly made up language and has a voracious appetite for chocolate cake and watermelon. To Sims Bishop (2007), Koko is an example of the portrayal of Blacks in children's literature in the early twentieth century as "stereotypical characters who existed merely to amuse Whites and entertain children" (p. 72).

As noted above, a number of scholars have pointed out that before the 1960s demeaning stereotypes of Blacks defined African American children's literature (Birta 1988; Harris, 1990). Some of these stereotypes were so prevalent in books that featured Blacks before the 1960s that African American poet and scholar Sterling Brown (1933) wrote about them in an essay for the *Journal of Negro Education* titled "Negro Character as Seen by Whites." Brown came up with seven categories to describe these stereotypes.

Although Brown's essay primarily analyzed adult fiction, many of the stereotypes that he wrote about also appeared in children's literature featuring Black characters during the same period. Brown's seven categories consisted of the "contented slave", "the wretched free man", "the comic Negro", "the brute Negro", "the tragic mulatto", "the local color Negro", and "the exotic primitive".

According to Brown, the stereotype of the contented slave was constantly in literature that focused on slavery that was written throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The contented slave was depicted as loyal to the master, grateful, and okay with their slave status. To Brown, contented slaves were depicted as being satisfied with their plight in slavery because they realized that their status with the master was secure and they were provided with everything that they needed to live a comfortable life.

In the young adult novel *Two Little Confederates* (1932) the stereotype of the contented slave is shown. In the novel, Thomas Paige details the beliefs, lives, and wealth of a plantation family and the lives of the slaves whom they owned. An excerpt from the text shows the stereotype of the contented slave. In the following passage the slaves are informed that they are free, but some refuse to leave the plantation:

Hi, Mistis," broke in Uncle Baila, "whar is I got to go? I wuz born on dis place an' I spec' to die here, an' be buried right yonder; and he turned and pointed to the dark clumps of trees that marked the graveyard on the hill, a half mile away where the colored people were buried. "Dat I does," he affirmed positively. "Y'all sticks by us, and we'll stick by you." (66)

*Elsie Dinsmore* (1868, 1893), a tale about a planter's daughter, is also filled with contented slaves, one of whom is Elsie's faithful mammy Aunt Chloe. Aunt Chloe epitomizes those Blacks who were supposedly loyal to the slave system (Harris, 1990). The following excerpt captures the relationship between Aunt Chloe and Elsie and the attributes of the contented loyal slave:

Aunt Chloe: My precious pet, my darlin' chile, your ole mammy loves you better dan life; an did my darlin forget de almighty Friend dat says, I have loved thee with an everlasting love, and I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee? (p. 64)

Violet Harris (1990) points out that in most early children's literature about slavery the contented slave is represented. She notes that in many of these books slavery is depicted as an idyllic institution and few of the horrors of slavery are rendered. She also notes that this representation was not only found in children's books, but also in other aspects of American culture. She points out that the contented slave was in cultural artifacts such as school texts and print advertisements for business that used the "mammy" and "uncle" stereotype to sell pancakes, hot cereal, and other commodities.

The wretched free man was also a common stereotype found in early African American children's literature. This stereotype presented slaves who escaped slavery as unfortunate souls who faced a great deal of harsh and horrible treatment. According to this stereotype, wretched free men struggled to survive on their own and ended up pining for the days as a slave on their master's plantation.

For example, *In Uncle Tom's Cabin for Children* (1908) by Harriet Beecher Stowe, although runaways George and Eliza were excited about their successful escape, they journey and they struggled as they attempted to make their way towards the "beautiful shores of Canada" (p. 153). In the days that followed their escape they suffered greatly because they, "the pair had not a dollar in the world and did not know where they would get their breakfast or what roof would shelter them" (p. 155). On many levels this stereotype supported the idea of the benevolence of slavery. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin for Children* George and Eliza's experience provided evidence that Blacks could only survive in society with the assistance of their White masters.

The comic Negro stereotype, illustrated with exaggerated physical attributes and prone to using large words they did not understand, was also prevalent on the pages of many children's books that featured Black characters (Harris, 1990). An example of the stereotype can be seen in an early twentieth century children's book about a simple minded, dim witted, Black boy named Epaminondas. *Epaminondas and his Auntie* (1907,1911,1938) written by Sara Cone Bryant and illustrated by Inez Hogan represents Blacks as comical looking people with jet-black skin, nappy hair, and darting eyes who talk in a weird way, and unintentionally destroy things because of their stupidity. Although, many cultures have a fool or comic who is represented in children's literature (Rudman, 2011), the stereotype was considered problematic because it added an already overabundance of negative representations of Blacks that existed in the world of children's literature.

Rudine Sims Bishop (2007) has pointed out that because books like *Epaminondas and his Auntie* (1911) were very popular in classrooms across the United States throughout the early twentieth century, they helped to popularize the comical character known as the pickaninny. She points out that the illustrations of the main character produced by Inez Hogan in *Epaminondas and his Auntie* (1911) is an excellent example of the comic pickaninny character. She notes that Hogan's illustrations of this character, with his exaggerated facial features and braids sticking out all over his head, was created to evoke laughter from young readers. To Sims Bishop, this representation sanctioned the image of the Black child as something that was to be continuously made fun of, laughed at, and disrespected for quite some time in the world of children's literature.

Diane Selig (2008) notes that Black librarians were troubled by this phenomenon and points out that they worked diligently to help make changes. She notes that librarian Charlemae Hill Rollins, head of the children's room at the South Side Branch of the Chicago Public Library, began a letter writing campaign to publishers in 1941 complaining about the lack of children's books that contained positive and accurate images of Blacks. In the same year, the National Council of Teachers of English sponsored the book, *We Build Together: Reader's Guide to Negro Life and Literature for Elementary and High School Use*. In the introduction, Rollins observed, "that realistic stories about Negro Life suitable for young people . . . were pitifully few [and] too many White writers [presented] Negroes as clowns or darky types" (p. 10).

With librarians like Charlemae Hill Rollins continuously fighting for change, eventually minor changes began to take place in children's books that featured Black characters in the 1940s. For instance, the title of the *Ten Little Niggers* became the *Ten Little Negroes: New Version* (1942) and included the use of the word Negro which was considered the politically correct distinction for Black people at the time. Furthermore, Martin (2004) notes that although many children's book creators still continued to portray Blacks negatively during the 1940s, a small but rapidly growing number of writers began to portray them in a positive manner.

For example, Holly Willett (2004) points out that Jessie Orton Jones began to challenge the idea of segregation when he created a positive interracial children's book called *Small Rain* (1943) that featured a Black boy playing with White children. Two years later another book, titled *Two is a Team* (1945), which was written and illustrated by a biracial creative team became the first picture book to depict an equal friendship

between a Black and White child (Bader, 2002; Johnson & Mango, 2004; Martin, 2004). According to Rudine Sims Bishop (1982), *Two is a Team* was one of the first children's books that focused on assimilation and integration. Harris (1990) notes that the publication of the text *Two is a Team* (1945) signaled a positive shift in a number of children's books that portrayed Blacks positively that were published and marked the beginning of integration of African American children's literature into the mainstream.

The shift in publishing practices was significantly influenced by Black writer Arna Bontemps whom Harris recognizes as the contemporary father of African American literature. She argues that Bontemps helped to propel positive Black characters in children's books into the mainstream culture.<sup>1</sup> Harris contends that this extensive body of work, which included sixteen novels, biographies, poetry anthologies, histories, and folktales, did much to stem the once steady tide of children's books that portrayed Blacks negatively. To Harris, the publication of his significant body of work is an indicator that there was a slowly growing acceptance of African American children's literature among White publishers and readers. With works like *Popo and Fifina* (1932), *You Can't Pet a Possum* (1934), *Lonesome Boy* (1955), and *Frederick Douglass: Slave, Fighter, Freedman* (1959), Bontemps' works served as a counterpoint to the negative images of Blacks in children's literature (Sims Bishop, 2007). According to Sims Bishop (2007), his works carried into mainstream children's literature some of the ideological, philosophical, and psychological values that were so important to *The Brownies' Book*. In his works young readers were presented with children's books that appreciated the life and culture of ordinary Black people.

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<sup>1</sup> In the 1940s, people involved in the intercultural education movement, a precursor multicultural education movement, also helped to advocate for the creation, publication, and classroom use of books that emphasized the existence of position relationships between various interracial groups.

Harris (1990) believes that Bontemps' work also helped to facilitate "a shift away from explicit racial themes to the more subtle use of race and emphasis on the authentic depiction of African Americans as they engaged in typical activities" (p. 549). Harris argues that although the mainstream acceptance of Bontemps' work played a role, the shift also corresponds with the start of the push for integration during that decade. She notes that during that period a small number of children's book writers like Jessie Jackson (not to be confused with the Rev. Jesse Jackson of civil rights fame) and Lorenzo Graham continued to break new ground by creating works about the African American experience for children of all races. She points out that the publication of their works by White-led publication houses increased readership of African American children's literature.

Rudine Sims Bishop (1982) writes that this was an important time in the history of African Americans because it was the beginning of what she labels as "socially conscious literature." She notes that authors like Jessie Jackson and Arna Bontemps created socially conscious African American children's literature "that was intended to develop empathy, sympathy, and tolerance for African American children and their problems" (p. 17). Bontemps' works captured the everyday lives of African Americans. His work ranged from representing the experiences of the Fisk Jubilee Negro Spiritual singers in *Chariots in the Sky* (1951) to urban everyday escapades of two young boys in *Sad-Faced Boy* (1937) to the rural experiences of a young boy and his dog living in the South.

Sims Bishop (2007) contends that children's books like *Call Me Charley* (1945) by Jessie Jackson, which focuses on a Black boy overcoming some racial conflict in an all white suburban Northern setting with the help of a few white allies, was written to

engender support and empathy for Black children facing racial discrimination in housing or schooling. She notes that while the characters in the texts are racially unbalanced because it is set in an all White environment, it was important because it was the first African American children's novel to confront racial conflict in a then contemporary Northern setting. To Sims Bishop, *Call Me Charley* and its sequels *Anchor Man* (1947) and *Charley Starts from Scratch* (1958), resembles a number of works published from the 1940s through the 1960s that constitute a set of ideologically related books that can be viewed as 'social conscience' books. To Sims Bishop, these social conscious books also fit snugly into the intercultural education movement, which was prevalent at the time and promoted socially conscious children's book to help with social integration. The movement also influenced many White writers to produce books featuring African American characters.

Following this small group of writers who produced socially conscious children's literature Harris (1990) notes that small Black group writers of children's writers and illustrators continued to take up the issue of the Black experience in the United States. Influenced by the early Black Arts, Black Power and Civil Rights movements of the 1960s, they created children's texts that they hoped would play a role in empowering Black youth and to foster self-determination in their community.<sup>2</sup> Rudine Sims Bishop (1982) argues that during these social movements a continually growing number of writers and illustrators began producing what she calls 'culturally conscious' African American children's literature that were created "to speak to the African American

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<sup>2</sup> The Black Arts and Power movements both focused on a push towards self-determination and empowerment for Black people. While people involved in the former primarily concerned themselves with the connection between art and politics, the latter concerned itself with the art of politics, race, and power. Broadly, the Civil Rights Movement with primarily concerned with the work of changing laws to evoke social, educational, and political equality in the United States.



children about themselves and their lives” (p. 49). Sims points out that these children’s books are set in an African American community or home, are told from the perspective of an African American, and include cultural traditions, language, and physical descriptions that identify the characters as Black.

Harris (1990) has noted that the list of writers who created culturally conscious African American children’s literature in the 1960s and 1970s far surpassed the number of children’s writers who represented Blacks in their books in previous periods. Sims Bishop (2007) points out that given the sociocultural context of this period it is not surprising that more authors were producing works that attempted to put more Black experiences, cultural traditions, and history into the world of children’s literature. Writers like Lucille Clifton, Tom Feelings, Eloise Greenfield, Rosa Guy, Virginia Hamilton, Sharon Bell Mathis, Walter Dean Myers, John Steptoe, Mildred Taylor, and Brenda Wilkinson are the first on a long list of children’s book creators who sought to produce culturally conscious African American children’s literature that aims to educate and entertain a diverse readership as well as empower Black youth by engendering racial pride. Rudine Sims Bishop (2007) argues that these authors created a significant body of children’s books that helped African American children’s literature “come into its own in the late 1960s and 1970s” (p. xi).

During the same time there was also the blossoming of the academic study of these works. Although these academic studies emerged from different disciplines, most of them focused on how these texts contributed to the empowerment of young Black readers. I call this body of research “empowerment studies” because the scholars who wrote about the culturally conscious African American children’s literature during this period sought

to explain how these books, as creative cultural products, helped to empower young Black children and provided them with tools to deal with institutional racism. With the emergence of substantially more African American children's literature produced in the 1960s and 1970s (Sims Bishop, 2007), scholars began to provide a seemingly common narrative that explained the emergence and purpose of these texts.

Throughout the late 1970s and 1980s, scholars like Rudine Sims Bishop (1982), Donnarae MacCann (1977), Gloria Woodard (1977), Beryle Banfield (1985), and Violet Harris (1987) wrote about the continued existence of racism in children's books and the emerging counter discourse that came in and continues to come in the form of quality, culturally conscious, and authentic African American-authored children's literature. Currently, as a whole, much of the scholarship about African American children's literature continues to focus on the existence of and challenge to negative stereotypes of Blacks found in children's literature.

### **Representation of Slavery in Children's Literature**

The objective of this part of the review of the literature is to examine the scholarship that primarily focuses on the representation of slavery in books for children and young adults. As noted earlier, since the 1970s a small subset of contemporary children's literature scholars have taken up the topic of slavery in books for children and young adults in their research. As a part of the sporadically growing group of post-1960s scholars (Harris, 2004; Pescosolido, Grauerholz, & Milkie, 1997; Sims Bishop, 2007) who write about the image of Blacks in children's literature, a subset from this group has taken up the issue of slavery in children's books.

Some of these scholars have presented informative studies about the stereotypically pre-twentieth century depictions of Blacks in children's books about slavery (Broderick, 1973; McCann, 1990). Others have focused on how contemporary children's writers have responded to these stereotypes in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century fiction works for children (Sims Bishop, 2007). However, the majority of the scholars from this group have centered their studies on the role that contemporary texts about slavery play in boosting the self-esteem of young Black readers (Broderick, 1973; Brooks, 2008; Chandler, 2006; Sims Bishop, 2007; Thompson, 2001).

Beginning with Dorothy Broderick (1973) many of the early children's literature scholars who wrote about slavery in children's and young adult books have focused on documenting the stereotypic and offensive ways that slaves were portrayed in these texts before the 1960s. As a group, these scholars have presented interdisciplinary studies that weave together historical, sociological, and literary analysis. Broderick, for instance, in the first three chapters of her book, presents a multidisciplinary analysis of the fictional treatment of slavery in children's literature from 1827 to 1967. In her noteworthy critical study, Broderick weaves together historical and literary analysis to argue that a significant number of books about slavery for children published during this period focused on presenting a moral defense for the institution and the enslavement of Blacks in America. She argues that the pre-1960's sociocultural and political landscape in the United States had an impact upon the construction and overwhelming acceptance of these books. To Broderick, these books reflect the racist ideas about the inferiority of Blacks in the United States from slavery days to the beginning of the civil rights movement.

Focusing on over a dozen fictional books, Broderick attempts to show that the prevalent theme in children's books about slavery produced during the period from 1827 to 1967 was the "proclamation that slavery was not only morally right, but also a natural condition" (p. 13). Broderick puts forth the claim that the children's writers who wrote about slavery during this time presented the argument that slavery was good for slaves as long as they had a good master. To make this point, Broderick examines a number of children's fictional books about slavery. She begins with Louise-Clarke Pynelle's *Diddie, Dumps, and Tot* (1882), a story about the experiences and exploits of three young daughters of a Southern planter who owned a large number of slaves on a cotton plantation in Mississippi, as one example where this can clearly be seen.

Broderick writes that Louise-Clarke Pynelle presents a romanticized depiction of the loyal hardworking slaves who were content with their plight in bondage on their good master's plantation. She argues that in a fictional children's text like *Diddie, Dumps, and Tot* (1882) children's book writers and illustrators throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century were interested in representing the widely held pre-emancipation view that slaves benefited from and were content with their kind and devoted masters during slavery times. In essence, through textual analysis she attempts to show that slaves were primarily represented in a manner that supported the idea that slavery was beneficial not only to the master, but also to the slaves.

Broderick also argues that these works attempted to present the belief that the institution of slavery benefitted society as a whole. By analyzing books like Louis Pendleton's *King Tom and the Runaways* (1890), Broderick presents the various portraits of Black slaves that existed under this overall theme of the positive nature of the peculiar

institution in children's books. From the happy slave to the gullible fool to the faithful and loyal servant, Broderick points out how these portraits served to justify the existence of slavery in America.

Drawing from the early controversial historical arguments that presented slavery as a necessary evil (Elkins, 1959), Broderick details how these particular portraits played a role in persuading young White children that infantile and dependent Black slaves benefited from the institution of slavery. To Broderick, the stereotypic portraits of Black slaves in these children's books also played a big role in maintaining the monolithic view that many White adults and their children held towards Blacks in America. She argues the books served as a tool for the continuation of the widely held belief of the dependent and subordinate nature of Blacks. To Broderick, the books provided some explanation for the continued existence of racism against Blacks.

Furthermore, she writes that her book was written "by a White for other Whites" (p. viii) to encourage them to assist in efforts to bring social change for Blacks in the United States. Realizing the benefits afforded to her because of White privilege, Broderick, a White woman, realized that her social position and her expertise as a teacher and a librarian could play a role in helping other Whites to realize the negative effect that children's books about slavery had on how Whites perceived Blacks in America. She also hoped that by reading her research Whites would realize the negative implications that these books could have on young Blacks as well. Beyond bringing attention to this issue, Broderick also made a public plea to children's book publishers for a more diverse and positive portrayal of Blacks living under slavery.

Broderick's book was groundbreaking because it highlighted the significant role that society plays in dictating content and attitudes within children's books and placed a spotlight on the role that these books can play in perpetuating particular social attitudes from one generation to the next. Her book also brought much needed attention to the plethora of stereotypic images of Black slaves that appeared in books that were published before the 1970s. Through her research, Broderick served notice that these works, which still found their way into the hands of children and adult readers after the 1970s, could play a significant role in shaping how Blacks were seen by Whites in the United States (Banfield, 1977). Broderick's work has been emulated by a small group of scholars that have continued to examine how Black slaves were portrayed in books about slavery written primarily for White audiences before the 1970s. Like Broderick, as part of their studies on the image of Blacks in children's literature, these scholars have dedicated space in their research to explore the representation of slavery in children's books written before the 1960s. Overall, these scholars have continued to argue that these works depicted Blacks in slavery in pejorative fashion and have shaped the racist perceptions that many White readers had of Blacks throughout much of the early twentieth century (Bingham, 1970; Jones, 1971; Latimer, 1973; MacCann, 1985, 1998; Martin, 2004; Sims, 1982).

In particular, Donnarae MacCann's 1998 critical cultural historical study about White supremacy in children's literature has advanced the scholarly examination of how Blacks were portrayed in children's texts about slavery that were written before the 1960s. In *White Supremacy in Children's Literature*, MacCann uses a multidisciplinary approach in an attempt to deepen readers' understanding of the various messages about

race that were presented in children's books about slavery written in the nineteenth century. She focuses on well-known writers such as Mark Twain, Harriet Beecher Stowe and Joel Chandler Harris, as well as lesser known writers such as G. Thompson, William Adams, and Louise-Clark Pynelle.

MacCann not only highlights the existence of stereotypical images in these books but also points out the significant role that these images played in perpetuating White supremacy in America. Like Broderick, MacCann highlights "what society does to influence attitudes in books, and how books extend the life span of social attitudes" (p. xiii). To make her argument about how "a white supremacist society produces white supremacist literature" (p. ix) MacCann begins her book with a focus on children's literature that was produced before 1865 by abolitionists. MacCann attempts to show that although the children's literature produced by these abolitionists during was created to help Blacks escape the institution of slavery, these works also served to perpetuate many of the stereotypes about Black slaves.

MacCann argues that children's literature created by abolitionists played a significant role in communicating white supremacist beliefs to young readers. She points out that although these children's book writers who were abolitionist were interested in ending slavery because they felt that having such an institution in the United States was wrong, they did not see Blacks as being equal to whites. She notes that some of these abolitionists saw Blacks as inferior beings that needed to be acculturated, guided, and taken care of once they were free. She also notes that there were also some abolitionists who frowned on integration and argued that once Blacks were free they should live apart from Whites even if it meant they had to return to Africa.

Throughout her book MacCann points out that the belief about the inferiority of Black slaves was on clear display in a number of children's books. By focusing on rarely explored works of children literature produced by white abolitionists and reformists like Matilda G. Thompson's (1859) *The Child's Antislavery Book*, Lydia Maria Child's (1831) *Juvenile Miscellany*, Eliza Lee Follen's (1840) *The Child's Friend*, Jacob Abbott's (1857) *Jasper's Experience in Command*, and John Townsend Trowbridge's (1864) *Cudjo's Cave*, MacCann pieces together an argument about the role that children's literature played in conveying the idea of White superiority and supremacy to White children during the nineteenth century.

For instance, she writes that it was typical of the books produced during this time to depict Black people who lived under slavery as foolish and unintelligent. She notes that an example of this can be found in *Cudjo's Cave* (1864). In the text a Black freed slave attempts to explain how he goes about making money and says:

Gold, sar! Gold, Miss Jinny! Needn't look spicious! I neber got 'em by no underground means! [He meant to say underhand]. Ye see, Massa Villars, eber sence ye gib me my freedom, ye been payin' me right smart wages,- seben dollar a monf!...An' you rec'lec' you says to me, you says, "Hire it out to some honest man, Toby, and ye kin draw nference on it, "you says. (p. 21)

MacCann argues presentations like this represented Blacks as ignorant and ill-informed. She asserts that even though radical White abolitionists and reformers tried to do good by creating children's books and tracts that pricked the American conscience about the evils of slavery, the outcome of these works was "that they injured the self esteem of Blacks while inflating the egos of European Americans" (p. 22).

MacCann's study is filled with examples from abolitionist writers that show how they communicated to young readers that Blacks were inferior, unintelligent, childlike,



did not deserve to be regarded as humans, and were to be caretakers to and for white people. She shows how these writings reinforced the race prejudice and bigotry that was prevalent towards Blacks at this time. For example, she notes that children's literature creators like Joel Chandler Harris, who is best known for his collection of Uncle Remus stories represents Black slaves in his texts as little children who needed guidance and support of their masters and were not capable of surviving on their own. MacCann points out that Harris believed his Uncle Remus stories introduced readers to life in the American south and served as a sympathetic supplement to Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) as a wonderful defense of slavery as it existed.

Overall, MacCann argues that children's literature about slavery was one of the primary ways to present White children in the antebellum period with the message of White supremacy. To MacCann, this message can be seen in numerous stereotypic portrayals of Black slaves in children's literature published before the 1960s. Like Broderick, MacCann's work is grounded in the claim of the cyclical relationship between societal beliefs and children's books. To MacCann, the books reflected the commonly shared White view of their superiority over Black people and served as a tool in the continuation of this social attitude into the future.

In the review of the scholarship regarding slavery in children's literature Broderick and MacCann's works serve as important bookends to studies that did much to bring attention to the prevalence of racist stereotypes about Black slaves in children's books written during the nineteenth century. Broderick and MacCann's studies stand apart from other scholarly works that focus on slavery in children's literature because they analyze books that are rarely still found in libraries, homes, or schools and explicitly

take up the issues of White supremacy and privilege. However, they are also are very similar to other studies about the representation in slavery because they focus on the impact that these texts have on young readers. Since the publication of Broderick's work in 1973, most of the scholars examining slavery in children's books have continued to center their studies on the impact that these texts have on readers (Brooks, 2008; Casement, 2008; Chandler, 2001; Harris, 1990; Hefflin & Barksdale, 2001; Lester, 2007; Martin, 2004; Sims Bishop 2007; Thompson 2001).

Taken as a whole, most of this scholarship has primarily focused on the role that contemporary children's books about slavery created by Blacks has played in improving the self esteem and self worth of young Black readers by de-stigmatizing slave ancestry and laying the responsibility and shame for the institution on the shoulders of the slaveholders and their supporters (Sims Bishop, 2007). Although there have been many texts about slavery created by White writers and illustrators, most of this scholarship has focused on the role that Black writers and illustrators have played in producing contemporary fictional narratives about slavery that counter the stereotypes that were once prevalent in books about slavery before the 1960s.

For the most part, these scholars have examined the bodies of work that Black children's book writers and illustrators have produced about slavery that reject the pre-twentieth century racist stereotypes about Black slaves. They have written about the various ways that authors and illustrators have attempted to debunk the idea that Blacks were stupid, unintelligent, obedient, and content with their plight as slaves. They have explored how these stories serve as cultural products that play a role in showing young African American readers that their heritage is filled with strong, intelligent, and

courageous ancestors who lived in slavery. They have also pointed out that beginning in the 1960s there has been a constantly growing body of children's books about Black slaves learning to read, outwitting their White master, or on the run towards freedom. To most of these scholars these books provide young Black readers with examples of individuals who were certainly not complacent with their lives as slaves.

Rudine Sims Bishop (1982, 1985, 1990, 1996, 2007) has completed a number of studies that serve as excellent example of the type of scholarly work about slavery described above. For instance, in *Free Within Ourselves: The Development of African American Children's Literature* (2007) she devotes a section to the presentation of slavery in African American children's literature. Using picture books and young adult novels she argues that contemporary "African American writers and illustrators have made it a point to depict life under slavery from the perspective of the enslaved" (p. 250). She argues that this perspective has been used in these texts as a way to reject earlier works of fiction that portrayed slaves as "carefree and content with their lives and not nearly as high on the scale of humanity as the slaveholders" (p. 251). She believes that some "African American children's literature writers and illustrators have attempted to humanize Black slaves by inviting readers to live through the experiences of characters who seem much like themselves or people they know and love" (p. 251).

To Sims Bishop, contemporary African American writers and illustrators have had a tendency to represent Blacks in their books for children about slavery as complex human beings experiencing the full range of human emotions. Through an extensive examination of notable children's books like Joyce Hansen's (1995) *The Captive*, Delores Johnson's (1993) *Now let me Fly: The Story of a Slave Family*, Julius Lester's (1982,

2000, 2006) *This Strange New Feeling*, *Time's Memory*, and *To be a Slave*, Patricia McKissack's (2003) *A Picture for Freedom: Diary of Clotee a Slave Girl*, and Andrea Davis Pickney's (1995) *Silent Thunder* Sims Bishop points out that three thematic threads have predominated in African American writings about slavery. One is the desire for freedom or the impulse that many blacks had to escape slavery. Another is the anguish that masters caused their slaves by forcibly separating spouses, siblings, parents, and children who lived under slavery. A third theme is the role that literacy played as liberating power and a threat to the institution of slavery (p. 252). Ironically, similar themes existed in the slave narratives that were written by those who escaped slavery. James Onley notes that the thematic elements that dominate slave narratives like Frederick Douglass' *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855) is literacy, identity and freedom. A research study that explores the connection between early nineteenth century slave narratives and children's books about slavery could expand and add additional complexity to the body of research about these texts.

To Sims Bishop, these particular themes have emerged in children's books about slavery because since the early 1970s African American writers and illustrators have been committed to dispelling the stereotype of the happy, ignorant, and gullible slave who was content in slavery. For Bishop, these writers and illustrators have attempted to respond to these stereotypes by creating texts that show young readers that many Blacks who lived under slavery were courageous and intelligent human beings who were continuously committed to finding their way towards freedom.

Furthermore, to Sims Bishop it seems clear that many contemporary African American writers and illustrators have committed themselves to empowering young

African American readers with their books about slavery. She argues that these writers and illustrators are doing valuable work because their books empower young African American readers by “reflecting back to the children positive images of themselves and their ancestors, transmitting some of the shared values of the African American community, and helping them learn to walk tall in the world” (p. 563).

In Sims Bishop’s view these African American writers and illustrators have been devoted to showing the strength, beauty, intelligence, and determination of African Americans who lived under slavery. She argues that these children’s book creators show young African American readers that Black people as far back as slavery days have always been resilient in the face of overwhelming odds. She states this message truly aids African American students in facing challenges that are certainly less crushing than those that many of their distant ancestors faced during slavery times.

Martha Collier (2005) has also argued about the role that contemporary children’s literature about slavery written by African Americans has played in empowering young African American readers. In her article titled “Through the Looking Glass: Harnessing the Power of African American Literature” (2005), Collier provides classroom teaching examples to show how some books written by African Americans about slavery can positively enhance the curriculum for African American children.

By examining classrooms where Ann Turner’s *Nettie’s Trip South* (1987) and Courtini Wright’s *Jumping the Broom* (1994) were used, Collier attempts to show how these books improved the educational experience for African American students. She argues that, “immersing African American students in stories about [Black] people is an important classroom tool towards helping them to develop a cultural mirror image which

reflects their place in the world as valid and valuable” (p. 235). To Collier, the use of these books helps to dispel the inaccurate images about Blacks that lived in slavery. She states that by reading these books African American children can learn about the bravery, honor, intelligence, and skill that permeate the rich history and heritage of the African American community. She points out that through stories such as these “African American students are empowered to exceed the limitations of prejudice and stereotype and are connected to their classroom curriculum in ways that are self-affirming and helps them to achieve academic success” (p. 241). Although Collier’s study is problematic because it makes some claims about the improvement of African American students’ self-esteem and academic success that are not clearly documented in her article, it serves as an excellent example of the type of research that scholars have done that attempt to show the connection between Black books about slavery and self-esteem of the young Black reader.

Like Collier, it appears that many of the contemporary scholars writing about children’s books about slavery written and illustrated by Blacks argue that these have great potential to improve the self-worth of young black readers. Children’s literature scholars such as Rose Casement (2008), Wanda Brooks (2008), KaaVonnia Hinton (2008), Karen Chandler (2006) Audrey Thompson (2001), and Michelle Martin (2004) have all written about the positive effect that contemporary books about slavery written by Blacks can have on young African American readers. Through a diverse array of reader response and textual analysis research this group of scholars has brought awareness to various ways that contemporary books about slavery can be used with young African Americans inside the classroom and beyond.

Overall these scholars have generated a body of research about slavery in children's literature that has addressed issues such as identity formation, socialization, and culturally conscious curriculum. To these scholars, African American creators of contemporary books about slavery have supported children of African descent through a process of developing a strong sense of identity that allows them to exceed the limitations of prejudice that still plague their world today (Collier, 2000). They have promoted favorable attitudes that foster positive behaviors among their African American readers (Sims Bishop, 1983) and enhanced the curriculum in schools (Thompson, 2001). To these scholars, these books not only serve to engage readers but they also help them to think about complex issues both in the past and present. They also believe that these books have the potential to help all students understand who we are today as a society and how we might become a better society tomorrow.

As noted earlier, it appears that most of the scholarship about children's literature has focused on the role that these books can play helping empower young Black people. To me, the prevalence of this assertion is partially connected to continued existence of white privilege and racism. Although many of these researchers (Sims Bishop, 2008; Brooks, 2008; Lester 2007) continue to see themselves as reporters of a trend that focuses on the ways that Black writers and illustrators have worked to offer counter narratives that challenge racist stereotypes of Black slaves, their work also speaks to the phenomenon or tradition referred to in critical race theory of Blacks using books to fight oppression and access more power in the United States, a theme that is foregrounded in her research. In many ways this research is a part of the discourse about the various ways

that Blacks fought to gain more rights and opportunities in a country that had for so long denied them legal equity.

Although it is important to note the place that these books hold in revealing much about the Black fight against racism and oppression in the United States, I agree with Rudman and Botelho (2009) that there is a need for scholars to be aware that people read texts using many different lenses. While some people may read contemporary books about slavery and focus on issues such as the strength, intelligence, and resiliency of Blacks slaves and how these texts might empower young Black readers, others may consider other issues. Recently, a small number of scholars moved beyond the issue of connection between contemporary literature about slavery and the empowerment of young Black readers by bringing new lenses to this area of study.

For example, Paula T. Connolly (2003) has focused on the depiction of violence and spiritual freedom in these books and Gail Sidonie Sobat (1977) has taken up the issue of ghosts and memory in children's books about slavery and Angela Hubler (2000), Wendy Roundtree (2008), and Karen Sands-O'Connor (2001) have examined the representation of gender in young adult novels about slavery. However, an overall exploration of children's literature scholarship about slavery also reveals that it is a part of an important body of research that explores the impact that African American and multicultural children's literature has had on empowering young people. Children's literature scholars writing about self-esteem and contemporary children's books about slavery have borrowed from and have asserted many of the same claims in this body of research.



In the section below, I outline the theoretical framework that will be used for this study to offer new theoretical tools to study children's literature about slavery. This theoretical framing provides lenses through which relationships between historical discourses about slavery and children's literature about the institution can be analyzed.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is informed by critical race theory, critical race feminism, critical multicultural analysis, and intertextuality. Because this dissertation is concerned with how race is represented in neo-slave narratives written for children, critical race theory is instructive to the framing of this study because it provides insights about the importance of race in children's and young adult literature. The theoretical framework used in this study also draws on critical race feminism in an attempt to explore how gender and race work together in children's literature about slavery. Critical multicultural analysis also informs this work because as a framework "it helps alert us to how [children's] literature can position readers in the interest of coercive power relations [and] challenges fixed and bounded notions of race, gender, and class" (Botelho & Rudman, 2009, p. 259).

Additionally, since I analyze the connection between various historical studies about slavery and children and young adult literature about the institution, intertextuality provides insight for understanding how meaning is made in this dissertation. Intertextuality also offers an orientation for exploring the connection between noteworthy historical studies about slavery and selected neo-slave narratives written for children during the past two decades.

## **Critical Race Theory**

I have chosen critical race theory (CRT) as a part of my theoretical framework because race and racism has been a significant part of the scholarly discussion about the representation of slavery in cultural artifacts. CRT has also been guiding because it provides valuable insights about the importance of race within the context of children's literature. Derrick Bell (1995), a scholar who is identified as a pioneer of the theory, states that CRT "is existentially [about] people of color and ideologically committed to the struggle against racism" (p. 98).

Underlying critical race theory is a number of basic tenets that focus on the issue of power and race relations in the United States. The first is that racism is a part of the fabric of our everyday lives and often appears natural instead of abnormal to most Americans. Many critical race theory scholars define racism as a system of privileges that benefits Whites and works to the detriment of people of color (Crenshaw, 1988; Ladson-Billing, 2000; McNair, 2008; Tate, 1997). Charles Lawrence (1987), a critical race theory scholar, argues that people in the United States share a historical and cultural heritage where racism has played a significant role shaping the experience of Whites and Blacks. According to Lawrence, racism has and continues to benefit Whites and burdens Blacks in places such as their schools, government, neighborhood, and workplace. Lawrence also argues that although the dominant public discussion about the impact of racism has diminished in recent years, it still remains with us as an intricate part of our culture. To Lawrence, manifestations of racism continue to emerge by way of racial stereotypes that pervade our media, language, and texts.

A second feature of CRT is that storytelling can be used to subvert dominant constructions of a social reality (McNair, 2008). Bell (1995) writes that “critical race theory writing is characterized by the frequent use the first person, storytelling, narrative, and allegory” (p. 99). To Ladson Billings (1998), stories or narratives are important to critical race theory scholars because they add context and challenge the notion of objectivity and positivism. Richard Delgado (1987) has also written about the importance of storytelling in critical race theory writing. He argues that presenting counter-stories about racial experiences are very important to people of color because they challenge dominant versions of reality.

A third tenet of critical race theory is the assertion that legal views must be challenged because they fail to recognize the legal system’s limitation to facilitate significant social change. Another tenet of CRT is the belief that civil rights legislation has been more useful to Whites than people of color. For example, Beverly Guy-Sheftall (2000) argues that White women have benefitted more than Blacks from affirmative action policies. She claims that this phenomenon has occurred because Whites, who are most commonly in charge of enforcing the hiring policies of affirmative action, selectively enforce them in a way that maintains White dominance. While there are various perspectives among critical race theorists, their common interest has been in exploring the relationship between racial power and the legal system (Bell, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Some of the tenets of critical race theory discussed above have been applied by scholars within the context of education during the past two decades (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Tate, 1997). Critical race scholars have argued that within the context of education

CRT is useful in providing important perspectives about curricula, pedagogy, and school funding. For example, critical race theory sees official school curriculum as a culturally specific artifact designed to maintain a White supremacy script and suggest that school instructional strategies presume students of color as deficient (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Furthermore, critical race theorists view school assessment as a tool to legitimize this presumption (Alienikoff, 1991; Gould, 1981). CRT theorists also argue that inequality in school funding is a function of institutional and structural racism and that this inequity leads to inadequate schools for student of color. Accordingly, these inadequate schools work towards limiting future opportunities for students of color, which helps to maintain White supremacy (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Jonda McNair (2008) has pointed out that while critical race theory has been used to explore the educational phenomenon described above it has rarely been applied within the context of children's literature. McNair has called upon scholars to use CRT because a number of its tenets are particularly applicable to the field. She argues that because racism is still very much a part of life in the United States, the CRT framework is a useful theoretical orientation to explore issues related to race in children's literature.

Because I agree with McNair's assertion about critical race theory and children's literature, I have chosen to incorporate some of its tenets into this study. Today there are still many people who believe that racism is a permanent fixture in American society and that it influences this culture in both subtle and overt ways. I have chosen to incorporate CRT into my theoretical framework because I believe that race and racism has and continues to influence the representation of slavery in children's literature and shape the way that critics, reviewers, and scholars write about this sub-genre of texts. For

example, from the early twentieth century *Brownies' Book* magazines to a recent picture book about slavery featured in this study by Ron Brown and Ntozake Shange (2011), scholars have argued that African Americans, teachers, librarians, and parents use children's literature to challenge racist and stereotypical notions of the Black slave (Johnson, 1990; Sims Bishop, 2007).

Grounding their work within a critical race theory framework, a few scholars have foregrounded racism and racist stereotypes in their scholarship about slavery in children's literature. For instance, Jonda McNair (2008) has asserted that *The Brownies' Book* magazines included stories about strong and assertive women such as Phillis Wheatley, Harriet Tubman, and Sojourner Truth to reject racist stereotypes about Black female slaves. Rudine Sims Bishop (2007) has also written extensively about the role storytelling by Blacks in the world of children's literature has played in re-imaging slavery in ways that rebuke racist representations of the Black slave that were prevalent in the past. Like McNair (2008) and Sims Bishop (2007), this dissertation explores issues related racial prejudice, stereotypes and racism in the representation of slavery in children's literature. Specifically, this study seeks to consider how these texts reconstruct and reproduce racist stereotypes about Black slaves that were once prevalent in historical studies that were published by historians such as Stanley Elkins (1959) and Ulrich B. Phillips (1918).

Although this dissertation uses tenets of the CRT framework, it also seeks to problematize it. While critical race scholars continue to make the important claim that racism continues to privilege Whites and work to the detriment of Blacks (Crenshaw, 1988; Ladson-Billing, 2000; McNair, 2008; Tate, 1997), I question whether this is the case concerning the publication and response to contemporary children's books about

slavery. Throughout the past four decades children's literature about slavery has been dominated by Black illustrators and a significant number of Black writers have been celebrated for their young adult fiction. In sharp contrast, during the same time White writers and illustrators have received much less praise for their fictional representations of slavery and a number White-authored young adult fictional works about the institution has received harsh criticism. For instance, *The Slave Dancer* (1974) has been rebuked for its racist and insulting representation of Black slaves (Mattis, 1977; Tate, 1977, Taxel, 1986). *Jump Ship to Freedom* (1981) and *War Comes to Willy* (1983) have been classified as texts to continue to conjure ugly stereotypes about slaves (Moore, 1985). One of the books in my text collection, *Come Juneteenth* (2007), has been harshly criticized for its historical inaccuracy (Hinton, 2007).

Tim Ryan (2008) has argued that the harsh criticism of White-authored adult novels about slavery received in the late 1960s apparently discouraged Whites from writing about the institution for three decades. Furthermore, Ryan believes that because White novelists were reluctant to write about slavery, it provided Black writers with an open field to construct a powerful discourse of their own about the institution. While Ryan's claim that Whites were discouraged from writing about slavery during the second half of the twentieth century does not apply to children's literature, it does appear that the works of children's Black writers and illustrators have been privileged over their White counterparts during the same period. In fact, since 1970 children's literature about slavery written and illustrated by Blacks has received a great deal of critical attention, numerous awards, and much praise. Furthermore, unlike the body neo-slave narrative for children created by Whites, Blacks children's works about slavery have been rarely

classified as historically inaccurate, challenged for negative stereotypes, or rejected as racist.

While this dissertation draws upon the critical race tenet that asserts that racism has and continues to influence the production of and response to African American children's literature (McNair, 2008), it moves beyond the assertion that privilege and power is always and simply determined by race. Additionally, although critical race theorists bring race to the very center of the analysis, that is not the case in this study. While this study acknowledges that race does significantly shape how we read and respond to children's literature about slavery, it also engages with and centers gender and class and how race works alongside these power relations. It is because of this engagement with these additional issues that I draw on the tenets of the theoretical frameworks outlined in the sections that follow.

### **Critical Race Feminism**

Critical race feminism (CRF) is a framework that draws on feminism and critical race theory. Critical race feminism adds to critical race theory by placing women at the center rather than in the margins or the footnotes (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Hill Collins, 1986, 2000). CRF takes up racism and race as tools that can be used to explore the continued presence of inequality. CRF also asserts that sexism continues to play a significant role in the oppression of women of color (Croom & Patton, 2011).

Critical race feminism is grounded in the belief that women of color face various forms of oppression. CRF challenges the notion of a monolithic female or Black experience and examines the lives of those facing the multiple discrimination on the basis of race, gender, and class, revealing how all of these factors interact within a system of

White male patriarchy and racist oppression (Davis, 1990). CRF also seeks to acknowledge and foreground the differences and diversity within women of color and articulate how to improve their status in society.

Thus, while CRF is concerned with theoretical frameworks, it is very much centered on praxis, seeking to empower women of color in systems or spaces that oppress them because of their race and gender (Allard, 1991). CRF has highlighted that women of color may consciously or unconsciously face multiple and simultaneous discrimination, not only solely based of their race, ethnicity and gender, but also due to their religion, class, disability, sexual orientation, nationality, language, age, stature, marital status, parental status, and/or political ideology (Wing & Smith, 2006). Currently, there is growing body of critical race feminists who operate from this intersectional approach to studying gender (Andersen & Collins, 2004; Baca Zinn & Thorton Dill, 1996; Hua, 2003). This intersectional approach acknowledges that race, gender, class and other power relations are dynamic, historically grounded, socially constructed and simultaneously operate at both micro-structural and macro-structural levels. The intersectional approach proposes that gender relations do not occur in a vacuum but, instead, that men and women also are characterized by their race, class, sexuality, age, physical ability, and other locations of inequality (Baca Zinn & Thornton Dill, 1996). In other words, this approach emphasizes that a power hierarchy—what Patricia Collins (2000) calls the “matrix of domination” exists in which people are socially situated according to their differences from one another.

Critical race feminists who operate within this perspective interpret gender as being socially constructed through interlocking systems of race, class, gender, and other



sources of inequality (Baca Zinn & Thornton Dill, 1996). In turn, this structural pattern affects individual consciousness, group interaction, and group access to institutional power and privilege (Andersen & Collins, 2004, p. 7). Furthermore, this approach proposes that these intersections of race class, gender, and other sources of inequality occur simultaneously and, therefore, create a distinct social location for each individual (Baca Zinn & Thornton Dill, 1996). In other words, the various axes of the matrix of domination intersect to create a particular status within the broader social structure, which constitutes one's social location (Andersen & Collins, 2004).

A key reason for exploring the intersection of race, class, and gender is the belief that social relations should be viewed in multiple and interactive manner not as additive (Daly, 1993). Thus, the main point here is that these elements work together to shape one's social location. Although at a given time race, class, or gender might feel more relevant, "they are overlapping and cumulative in their effect on people's experience" (Andersen & Collins, 2004, p. 7). CRF also calls attention to the ways in which intersecting systems of power act on all social-structural levels noting that class, race, gender, and sexuality are components of both social structure and social interaction. In essence, women and men are differently embedded in locations created by these cross cutting hierarchies and as a result, women and men throughout the society experience different forms of privilege and subordination (Baca Zinn & Thornton Dill, 1996).

Another important aspect of this approach is the notion that all people can simultaneously experience both oppression and privilege and that no individual or group can be entirely privileged or entirely oppressed (Collins, 2000). The theoretical starting point [of this perspective] is that there are multiple and cross cutting relations of class,

race-ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and age. One more important concept of the approach is relationality. Relationality assumes that groups of people are socially situated in relation to other groups of people based on their differences. For instance, this means that women's differences are connected with other groups in systematic ways (Baca Zinn & Thornton Dill, 1996). The intersectional approach, informed by CRF, offers a broad, rich, and comprehensive theoretical framework for studying gender alongside race and class.

Additionally, critical race feminists also assert that because of the social location of women of color, their experiences can provide insight into the social and political landscape. They argue that their social position can help unveil systematic effects of racism, classism, and sexism. Regarding the issue of the representation of women of color in literature, similar to CRT theorists, critical race feminist maintain that storytelling can be used to subvert dominant constructions of a social reality. To critical race feminist stories can perform acts of resistance against oppression based on gender, class, and race. Drawing on critical race feminism this study seeks to move beyond solely looking at race in the examination of the representation of slavery in children's literature. Here, instead of solely analyzing race in isolation, this study seeks to explore the intersection of race, gender, and class in the narratives about slavery that appears in these texts.

The next section explores how critical multicultural analysis expands upon the theoretical framing that has been used for this study. Whereas CRT and CRF is instructive in an exploration of the representation of the oppression of Black slaves by Whites, CMA offers micro-analytic tools that guide analysis regarding how gender and class and race works alongside the power relations in the children's literature.

## **Critical Multicultural Analysis**

Critical Multicultural analysis foregrounds the reading of power. It provides readers with the tools to represent how power is “exercised, circulated, negotiated, and reconstructed” (Botelho, 2004, p. 90). It is an approach that helps to identify oppressive social practices. According to CMA, power is an important element in the examination of any text (Botelho & Rudman, 2009). It argues that texts should be read with a critical lens to deconstruct assumptions, uncover stereotypes, unmask ideologies, and reveal power relations. As cultural artifacts, children’s books can provide insights into the complex nature of the power relations of race, gender, and class. CMA calls for this type of analysis because it acknowledges diversity and uses it as a means for learning, by moving beyond mere affirmation to indivisibility and critique (Nieto, 2000) through an examination of hegemony and issues of social power.

Much more than CRT and CRF, CMA opens a space for agency as readers make sense of texts. The architects of critical multicultural analysis (Maria José Botelho and Masha Kabakow Rudman) concur with Michael Foucault’s (1980) claim that every person exercises and demonstrates power. They argue that a person can use power that will harm or help others and note that an individual can exercise power in each category depending on their situation. In describing notions of power Foucault maintains that in order to understand how power is rendered in the present it is important to consider how it exists in the past. He writes that power in a substantive sense doesn’t exist. He argues that a person does not own power and that power, to some extent, brings about hierarchal relations that are enabled and maintained by micro-relations that can be troubled from the top downwards or from below to the above. Foucault is important to CMA because he

argues that society creates discourses as much as they create us. “ It is within this discursive grid that we learn about how we may or may not access power, how to exercise this power as well as how power is exercised” (Botelho, 2004, p. 75).

A critical multicultural analysis helps readers to unpack power relationships. It locates power on a continuum that has four positions from which people exercise power: domination, collusion, resistance, and agency. Botelho and Rudman (2009) maintain that a person can exercise power across the continuum depending on the situation. Botelho (2004) writes that “the continuum exists because of structural inequities [and that] we live in in raced, gendered, and classed hierarchal arrangements in the [United States]” ( Botelho, 2004, p. 91). She notes that it is important to recognize that power is “exercised in dominated and/or collective ways [that] is coercive in constitution” (Botelho, 2004, p. 91). CMA also maintains that power is relational and exists on a zero–sum scale. Furthermore, “when one person or group has more power, there is less for everyone else” (Botelho, 2004, p. 91).

In critical multicultural analysis of children’s literature the readers analyze how characters are positioned on its power continuum scale. In the paragraphs that follow each of the positions on the CMA power continuum is discussed. Domination (or oppression) is “the practice of exerting power over another. It exists when a person has control over their own and other individuals’ social circumstances. It is the exercise of control or influence over someone or something. It is supremacy or preeminence over another. This position’s attributes include dehumanization, imposition from external sources, victimization, and unequal power based on class, gender, and race. [At times], domination occurs de facto due to existing social constructs and systems. Sometimes, it is

interpersonal and used to manipulate the behavior of particular individuals. It “is [consistently] dehumanizing due to the inequity of access, decision making, participation, and voice” (Botelho & Rudman, 2009, p. 118).

Domination can also be conscious or unconscious. It is conscious when it involves action that revolves around trying to attain and maintain power in abusive, deceitful, dishonest, fraudulent, harmful, and manipulative ways. Domination is conscious when someone is fully aware that they are controlling social circumstances. Therefore, domination is conscious when it is an intentional act that is carried out to gain power over others.

In contrast, unconscious domination is not intentional. Domination is unconscious when an individual takes their power for granted and assumes it is to be an expected norm. Pierre Bourdieu (2001) has written about this unconscious domination in his book *Masculine Domination*. In this book he notes masculine domination is so anchored in social practices and the unconscious that individuals barely perceive it. Furthermore, it is so much in line with the shaped perceptions of the masses that most find it difficult to call it into question.

On the power continuum those who are dominated by other individuals exist in the position of victim. Individuals who are controlled, influenced, or oppressed by another person or group are considered victims. According to CMA a victim is a person who is dehumanized, disrespected, and deprived of resources. Victims are also individuals who treated unequally or are oppressed because of racism, classism, or sexism. Because this study focuses on the representation of slavery, it is important to consider the position of victim. However, it is important to recognize that CMA asserts

that every person exercises and demonstrates power. Even victims, despite their position on the power continuum, can exercise or demonstrate power and move across the power continuum. For instance, while all Black slaves were victimized by a power system that was based on race, class, and gender during the antebellum period, they exhibited agency and exercised power in ways that allowed them to resist domination.

Collusion may also be conscious or unconscious. However, this position is different from domination, primarily due to the characteristic of internalized oppression. Conscious colluders remain silent about injustice, oppression, racism, sexism, and other wrongdoings even though they are knowledgeable about it. Towards the end of the continuum of collusion, colluders become conscious of their power to take action, while conspiring with dominant ideologies to gain power to resist and gain agency” (Botelho & Rudman, 2009, pgs. 118-119).

While these subject positions provide information about identifying how power is exercised and asserted, it is important to recognize that the reason that people exercise power in a particular manner is a complex phenomenon. Because collusion can be conscious or unconscious, it may be difficult to determine why a person decides to collude with a dominant power. If an individual is conscious about domination and remains silent, it is possible that they agree with this dominance and remain silent to support it. However, an individual can also be knowledgeable about domination and remain silent because they feel they lack power to make change because of oppressive societal structures. Furthermore, some individuals may be somewhat unconscious of full nature of oppression because it is internalized, which makes them unaware of the fact that silence is the power of collusion. They may also be aware of the oppression but believe

that their silence and obedience is expected and need for the survival of their community.

Another position on the CMA power continuum is resistance. “Resistance is active questioning; it is the quintessential construct of post-structuralism. It is not haphazard or purely reactive. It is an unwillingness to be universalized. It is oppositional, and combative. It is the act of resisting oppression (Botelho and Rudman, 2009). It is the active refusal to accept or comply. It is speculative. Resistance must be conscious. It is also speculative, multidimensional, and challenges discourses. It is the shaking up of a system with new discourses. An individual may resist domination by actively arguing, questioning, challenging, protesting, or working with others in a similar situation.

Agency is the last position of the CMA continuum. “Agency is initiation and power. Agency ideally resides with all classes, genders, and ethnicities. Agency is all inclusive and complex. A person can be agent while at the same time holding another subject position. Being able to read multiple discourses is part of agency, as well as holding contradictory discourses. Agency is the understanding that it is the ultimate subjectivity (Botelho & Rudman, 2009, p.119). It is important to note that agency is also conscious. To exercise the power of agency is to complete an act that will benefit a community or society. Additionally, agency does not give oppressed groups dominant power over their oppressors. It does not mean that those who are oppressed will now become dominant. Agency is when groups of people share power and make decisions that will benefit all individuals based on social justice.

In sum domination is power over someone or something. Collusion is internalized oppression that is conscious or unconscious. Resistance is the conscious effort to challenge oppressive practices. Agency is power with someone or something.

In my analysis and discussion about the intersection of race, gender, and class in children's books about slavery in this dissertation the categories above described is employed to explore the exercise of power among the characters in the picture books that make up my text collection. In my analysis of the featured picture books, drawing on CMA, I analyze how micro-interactions among characters circulate, maintain, interrupt, and/or transform this power structure that existed under slavery.

### **Intertextuality**

This dissertation also adds an additional lens to this exploration by looking at children's literature about slavery against its historical scholarship about the institution. Intertextuality is part of the theoretical foundation of this dissertation. Because this study is grounded by the assumption that historical studies and fiction written by adults has 'influenced' contemporary neo-slave narratives written for children, some of the basic tenets of intertextuality have proved informative in shaping the direction and approach of this work. Intertextuality establishes that no text stands alone. It maintains that a text cannot be isolated and establishes that the assertions, claims, and discourses of older texts are engaging with later texts. Because of this, there is an endless stream of interconnectivity between texts where ideologies are countered, re-casted, and reshaped. In essence, in every text is there is an absorption and transformation of another text.

For a number of literary theorists, the idea of texts influencing each other was replaced with intertextuality during the second half of the twentieth century (Kehinde, 2003). According to Kehinde (2003), the idea of influence in literature was replaced because it was deemed too author-centric and evaluative. Although the belief that one writer's work could influence another had been a tool for subjective literary historians for



a long time, because of its heavy emphasis on authorship the idea eventually gave way to intertextuality. However, Kehinde notes that shift from influence to intertextuality “did not do away with author-centric criticism; rather, it aimed towards taking into account the multifarious relations that can exist among writers and texts” (p. 372).

By the late 1960s the theory of intertextuality emerged as a common framework that could be used to explore the relationship between people’s discourses, voices, and texts (Juvan, 2008). The basic tenets of intertextuality were first outlined in Northrop Frye’s (1957) *Anatomy of Criticism*. According to Frye, literature is a cultural artifact that contains life and reality in a system of verbal relationships. Frye asserted that intertextuality, looking at texts in relationship to each other, allowed for the examination of the connection between ‘major’ writers with ‘minor’ figures in a multiple typology based on relation and difference.

Julia Kristeva (1980) has also championed intertextuality as a way to discover the connection between, and meaning of, and complex development of texts. Noted as the scholar who coined the term intertextuality, she first used the word in her discussion about the texts of Mikhail Bakhtin (1941, 1965). Kristeva’s coinage of intertextuality represented an attempt to synthesize Ferdinand de Saussure’s (1915, 1966) semiotics, the study of how signs derive meaning within the structure of a text, with Bakhtin’s dialogism. To Bakhtin, dialogism is the process whereby a text carries on a continual dialogue with other literary works and writers. In Bakhtin’s perspective a dialogic text not only answers, corrects, silences, or extends previous literary works, but it also informs and is continually informed by them. In essence, dialogic literature is in dialogue with multiple literary and non-literary works. To Bakhtin (1982), the dialogue has a

strong influence in both directions, that is, the present text shapes the previous work.

Bakhtin used the concept of dialogism to capture the meaning making process by which history and the present come together. Building on semiotics and dialogism, Kristeva argues that intertextuality can be used to describe how texts are created. To Kristeva, all texts are constructed as a mosaic and they are an absorption and transformation of another. Kristeva's contention is therefore that intertextuality is an instance where a text depicts a reading of previous text, thereby making the absorption of and a reply to another text.

Kristeva's work on intertextuality has been followed by a number of scholars who have articulated similar claims about the creation and connection between texts. Vincent Leitch (1983) noted "that prior texts reside in present texts and hence, no text itself is ever fully self-present, self-contained, or self-sufficient" (p. 98). To Leitch, intertextuality can be explained in the way that every literary text is irreducibly infiltrated by previous texts. Meyer Howard Abrams (1981) defines intertextuality as a creative means to signify the multiple ways in which any one literary text echoes, or is inescapably linked to, other texts, whether by open or covert citations or illusion. Abrams also notes that intertextuality also speaks to the ways that a text assimilates the features of an earlier text through common literary codes and conventions. Similarly, Terry Eagleton (1983) observes that all literary works are to some extent influenced by earlier texts. Eagleton has also put forth an explanation that describes the difference between conventional and postmodern intertextuality. According to Eagleton, conventional intertextuality is somewhat similar to good old-fashion idea of influence and is generally conscious and sporadic. In sharp contrast, in Eagleton's view postmodern intertextuality is conscious

and so pervasive that it is impossible for writers not to draw ideas or discourses from earlier texts.

Ludin (1998) and Hathaway (2009) have argued that intertextuality can provide important new ways to read, analyze, and teach children's literature and young adult literature. Hathaway (2009) has pointed out that it is important for researchers to consider that children's and young adult texts are multidimensional spaces in which a variety of writings bend and clash. Letcher and Bull (2009) have also argued that the realization that texts are not separated entities, but connected discourse, can provide students, researchers, and teacher with a wide range of critical ways in which literature for children is read.

Wendy Doniger (2004) has also pointed out that intertextuality can have many uses in the scholarly examination of literature. She argues that it lets readers eavesdrop on the conversations between storytellers' centuries and continents apart and lets them observe a writer's art not only within the storytelling tradition, but also in relationship other genres, disciplines, discourses, and texts. Doniger's description of intertextuality provides insight into a substantial part of the theoretical framework used in this dissertation. Guided by a theory of intertextuality, this study aims to explore the relationship between contemporary neo-slave narratives written after 1990 with previously published noteworthy historical studies about the institution. In this dissertation I use this approach to examine how contemporary young adult novel and picture book representations of slavery engaged with the discourses about the institution that were constructed throughout much of the twentieth century.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

*“The frontiers of the book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first lines, and the last full stop, beyond the internal configurations and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other sentences; it is a mode within a network”*

- Foucault (1969)

#### **Introduction**

This chapter describes the methodological approach that is used for this dissertation. It includes information about the analytic techniques that are employed to examine how slavery is represented in the children’s literature featured in this study. To provide readers with a summary of my research approach, I first begin by restating the research goals of this dissertation. After this, I write about how I draw on critical race theory, critical race feminism, and critical multicultural analysis to explore how race, gender, and class are represented in the picture books featured in this study. Then, the chapter turns to a description of the analytic techniques that are used to analyze the illustrations that appear in the picture books in my text collection. After this, a section about the genre of historical fiction is presented. The chapter concludes with a section that focuses specifically on book selection, trustworthiness, and the limitations of this study.

#### **Research Purpose Restated**

The purpose of this study is to explore how slavery is represented in the contemporary children’s picture books featured in this study. I primarily examine how slavery is rendered through words and images in these texts. The analysis of the representation of slavery is guided by a theoretical framing that draws on critical race theory, critical race feminism, critical multicultural analysis, and intertextuality.

This study considers how picture books about slavery reconstruct and reproduce raced, gendered, and classed stereotypes. In this study, I acknowledge that children's literature about slavery is a historical and cultural product and explore how race, gender, and class are represented in these texts. Additionally, this study seeks to explicitly identify and analyze connections between the early historiography of slavery and the contemporary neo-slave narratives written for children. It also explores the relationship between the children's books about slavery featured in this study and sociopolitical and historical contexts.

### **Methodological Approach**

It is important to note that in this study methodological approach refers to the “systematic yet dynamic . . . social scientific formation that provides loosely defined structures for conceiving, designing, and carrying out research projects” (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, p. 17). I use the term approach here following Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005) over the commonly used research methods or methodology, which “falsely connotes rigid templates of a set of techniques for the proper conduct of research” (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, p.17). My research benefits from previously established methodological approaches of critical race theory (Bell & Clarke, 1998; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Hinton 2008; McNair, 2008; Sims Bishop, 2007; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002), critical race feminism (Collins, 2000; DuCille, 1994; Roundtree, 2008; Marshall, 2008) and critical multicultural analysis for the study of race, gender, and class in children's and young adult literature (Botelho, 2004; Botelho & Rudman, 2009; Kelly, 2008; Rois, 2006).

In the three sections that follow I describe how critical race methodology, critical race feminism, critical multicultural analysis, and intertextuality have shaped the methodological approach that is enacted in this dissertation research. In these sections, I also include details about why I chose the methodological approaches that are derived from these epistemologies. The decision to include the why along with the how in this chapter emerges from “the fact that epistemologies [such as critical race methodology and critical race feminism], which are derived from the socio-cultural histories of people of color, continue to be devalued and dismissed as limited and illegitimate” (Scheurich & Young, 1996). To join those who struggle to maintain recognition and validation of these epistemologies (Christian, 1994; Hughes & Giles, 2010; Scheurich & Young, 1996), I have incorporated details about why these methodological approaches have been chosen for this study about the representation of slavery in children’s literature.

### **Critical Race Methodology: Reading Race**

This study rests heavily on methodological approaches drawn from critical race theory (See Chapter 2). Critical race methodology (CRM) is a theoretically grounded approach to research that foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research process, challenges the traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories that have been used to explain the experiences of people of color, and offers transformative solutions to racial injustice and oppression. At its core critical race methodology is employed to uncover how race and racism work within various spaces within society (Parker & Lynn, 2002).

For those who conduct research about the world of children’s literature, critical race methodology provides a way for understanding how the experiences of people of

color are represented in children's texts. CRM also contextualizes the representation of the people of color in children's books and provides an opportunity for insight into the role that books by and about people of color can play in racial uplift and oppression. It also "encourages [researchers] to deal with the ongoing and seemingly never ending choreography of race that has been present since the early founding of the United States" (Ladson Billings, 2005, p. viii). Additionally, critical race methodology helps to produce important knowledge by examining those who have been marginalized, silenced, and disempowered (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

The use of a critical race methodology in studies about children's literature requires that ideologies of race and racism guide critical analysis. Because CRM places race and racism at the center of critical analysis it serves as a useful tool to highlight issues related to race within the context of children's literature. To those who employ critical race methodology this is important because in the history of children's literature scholarship far too many scholars and methodological approaches have dismissed race and racism as important units of analysis (Hinton, 2005; Martin, 2004; Sims Bishop, 2009).

The continued dismissal of race and racism in children's literature research and criticism has led to the continuation of marginalization of people of color and their experiences in the body of scholarship about children's books. Although there is a number of scholars who have published critical studies about the experiences of people of color in children's books throughout the past few decades (Botelho & Rudman, 2009; Cai, 2002; Harris, 1990; Smith, 1994; Sims Bishop, 2009), considering that the current

sociopolitical landscape is filled with debates and discussions about race and racism,<sup>3</sup> there are shockingly few children's literature studies that center these ideologies in the research analysis. In fact, despite the rich racial diversity and the continued existence of plethora of racial issues in United States, most of the children's literature, research, and reviews in this country continue to focus on solely Whites and their experiences.<sup>4</sup>

Recognizing this pervasive phenomenon, scholars like Rudine Sims Bishop (2009) and Wanda Brooks (2008) have called for more critical children's literature research that centers on issue related to the ideologies of race and racism. Sims Bishop asserts that by focusing on issues related to race and racism in children's literature research and situating it within social and political contexts, scholars can open a way for more attention to diverse literatures, a deeper understanding of race, and greater awareness of racial oppression and injustice. She argues that by downplaying or dismissing race in the children's literature discourse we are on a dangerous path of making it appear that race no longer matters. Furthermore, as Solorzano and Yosso (2002) assert, the lack of research on issues related to race and racism in the research discourse also helps tell majoritarian stories about the insignificance of race and the notion that racism something of the past.

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<sup>3</sup> The sociopolitical landscape has been filled with conversations about race and racism. These conversations have been sparked by the election and subsequent reelection of the first black president, the release of a movie (*Django Unchained*) about slavery that was written and directed by a White man (Quentin Tarantino), and the fatal shooting of Oscar Grant III by a white police officer, and the death of Trayvon Martin.

<sup>4</sup> In 2012, of the 3,600 books reviewed by the Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC), 3% were about African Americans, 1.5% were about Latinos/as, less than 1% were about Native Americans, 2% were about Asian Pacific Americans, and 93% were about Caucasians. In the same year in *Journal Children's Literature Quarterly*, only 3 research articles focused on the representations of people of color in children's literature. In many other research journals in the field of children's literature this is the common trend.



Using a critical race methodology to study children's literature dismisses the idea that racism no longer exists and rarely makes its way into the contemporary children's books. It also confirms that race still matters and that we must continue to look at experiences with and responses to racism as valid, appropriate, and necessary forms of data (Solorzono & Yosso, 2002). In essence, CRM allows researchers to present substantive discussions about race and racism in children's literature. In choosing CRM for this study, important and significant analysis about race and racism in children's literature about slavery is presented. This analysis explores the connection between history, race, stereotypes, and slavery and incorporates details about the role that a sociopolitical context plays in shaping how race, class, and gender is rendered in children's literature about slavery.

To collect data that would help me to present my findings I use the ideologies of race and racism as categories to guide my analysis and draw on the critical race methodological tool of looking at narratives (storytelling and counter storytelling) and intertextuality to examine how creators of children's literature about slavery respond to and engage with perspectives and presuppositions about Black slaves found in the early historiography of the institution.<sup>5</sup> It is through this methodological approach that I explore how children's literature about slavery remains a site where the struggle to reject, counter, and sometimes recast racist and gendered stereotypes about Black slaves takes place. Indeed, children's literature about slavery has functioned centrally in debates about

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<sup>5</sup> The storytelling found in children's literature has and continues to be important tool in justifying particular positions about slavery in the United States. In her recently published book-length study about Slavery in American Children's Literature, Paula Connolly (2013) has noted that since antebellum times literature has been one of the most powerful weapons in debates about slavery. She points out that since slavery times literature was used to engender sympathy for one's position.

slavery and the construction of race since the antebellum period in the United States (Connolly, 2013).

In analyzing this phenomenon I considered whether the children's picture books featured in this study reject, counter, or re-inscribe representations of male and female slaves that were dominant in the early historical discourse about slavery. I also considered how slave owners, masters, overseers, and plantation mistresses are represented in the same manner. This consideration was carried out through a series of intertextual practices that involved the reading and rereading of the books in my text collection alongside a few noteworthy studies from the early historiography of slavery in United States. In essence, while reading intertextually, I analyze the representation of Black slaves found in children's literature about slavery to determine if they counter or align with the representations about Black slaves found in a few early twentieth historical studies about the institution.<sup>6</sup>

Specifically, I read the children's literature featured in this study with the noteworthy studies completed by Stanley Elkins (1959) and U.B. Phillips (1918). During these intertextual readings, I examine how my text collection responds to and engages Phillips' representation of slavery as a kind and paternalistic institution with submissive slaves and Elkins' assertion that Black slaves were docile and content.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> One of the primary perspectives of this study is that contemporary children's literature about slavery stages an exploration of history as a discursive field. In this exploration these texts make compelling arguments about the nature of slavery and slave identities, thus engaging with and contributing to the contemporary historical discourse about the past.

<sup>7</sup> As I noted in Chapter 1, the studies of Elkins and Phillips are considered noteworthy in the early historiography of slavery. Phillips' representation of slavery as kind and paternalistic and Elkins' assertion that Black slaves were docile and content have and continue to be present in many contemporary debates about the nature of slavery. Because it has been argued that these two historians played a significant role in maintaining negative stereotypes about Black slaves in the discourse about the institution of slavery in the United States (Holt, 1997; Ling, 1997; White, 1999; Roper, 1994), I was interested in juxtaposing their work against the children's literature texts featured in study.

This juxtaposition provided an opportunity to discover how the neo-slave narratives featured in this study engage with the assertions about the docile and contented nature of the Black slave and the paternalistic attitude of the White slave owner. Essentially, in this study I explore how the children's books in my text collection reshape, reinvent, and reject Elkins' and Phillips' rendering of Black slaves as "submissive, stupid, docile, irresponsible. . .given to lying and stealing, . . .silly. . .[and with] talk inflated with childish exaggeration" (Elkins, 1959, p.82). I also consider how these texts engage with the notion that slave owners were benevolent masters who cared for their slaves.

Through this exploration I also consider whether the stories told in the children's books featured in this study can be read as counter-stories or stories that challenge the narrative of a kind and caring slave system with docile and contented slaves. Do they represent the experiences of people whose stories are not often told? Can they be viewed as tools for exposing, analyzing, and challenging dominant stories of racial privilege? If yes, how? Do they shatter complacency, challenge dominant discourses on race and racism, and further the struggle for racial reform? Again, if yes, how? In addressing these questions, drawing on CRM, my analysis expands from the intertextual readings of my text collection and the studies of Elkins and Phillips to include the consideration of historical and sociopolitical context. How did the historical and sociopolitical climate in which these texts were produced shape the representation of slavery that exists in the children's books featured in this study? What do these texts reveal about the history of race, racism, class, and gender in the United States? How does gender, race, and class

work together to shape the construction of particular ideologies, political actions, and forms for resistance?

In answering these questions I deconstruct the ideological positioning and relationship that the books in my text collection have with the historical and sociopolitical context in which they were conceived and published. Specifically, in considering a historical context I focus on the influence that the Civil Rights movement , Black Power, and current social justice and equity movements may have had on shaping the representation of the Black slave found in the picture books featured in this study. I explore the relationship that exist between the picture texts in this study between the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s and contemporary social justice and equity movements that seek enfranchisement for people of color on all fronts in the United States. I also consider how recent studies about slavery also engage with the picture books analyzed in this dissertation.

Next, in considering a sociopolitical context, I draw on one of the analytic lens of critical multicultural analysis, to help me explicate what the books in my text collection are doing in the world (Botelho & Rudman, 2009; Kelly, 2004; Pennycook, 2000; Reese, 2001; Rois, 2006). In analyzing the interaction that the picture books featured in this study have with the world, I draw on a methodological tool of critical multicultural analysis (CMA) and examine what messages about race, racism, and power are imbedded in book reviews, research, and other literature about the books featured in this study. In essence, what do these books doing in the world? How are they being received?

### **Critical Race Feminist Methodology: Reading Race, Gender, and Class**

This study also draws on a critical methodological approach derived from critical race feminism (CRF). As one of the branches of critical race theory, critical race feminism also centers race and racism, challenges traditional paradigms, focuses on people of color, and offers transformative solutions to racial injustice and oppression. A critical race feminism methodological approach seeks to emphasize the multiplicity of the voices of women of color (Carter, 2012; Carter, 2012; Crenshaw, 2004; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). Drawing on feminism and critical race theory, a critical race feminist methodological approach is a process of inquiry by which scholars and critics read, analyze, and theorize about literary works by and about women of color. To bring women of color from the margins and focus on their issues and experiences in the real world a CRF methodological approach centers Black women in the research process (Collins, 2000, Miller, 2008; Razack, Smith, & Thobani, 2010, Rubinstein-Avila, 2007; Wing, 2003) According to Adrien Katherine Wing (2003), critical race feminism serves as an answer to the invisibility of women of color in the areas such as academic research, the law, and schools. Essentially, using a CRF analytic approach places women of color at the center of analysis rather than in the margins or the footnotes of research and speaks to their unique experiences in the world (Crenshaw, 1989). In moving women of color from the margins, CRF also emphasizes that the experiences that shape the perspectives of women of color are different from those that impact the lives of men of color, White women, and White men (Wing, 2003; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010).

By placing women of color at the center of analysis, a CRF methodological approach is concerned with the various forms of oppression, and the ways that that

oppression manifests in the lives of women of color due to the intersectionality of race, class, and gender (Wing, 2003; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). In essence, it explores the lives of those who have faced discrimination because of their race, class, and gender and reveals how the combination of these identities/ideologies interact in a system of White male patriarchy and racist oppression (Harris, 1990). After exploring and exposing this interaction, a CRF methodological approach attempts to acknowledge and celebrate the unique lives of women of color and articulate how they might improve their status in society. This is important because while critical race feminism is interested theoretical frameworks, it is also very much concerned with praxis, seeking to identify ways to empower women of color (Allard, 1991). So while critical race methodology centers race and racism in its analysis, a CRF methodological approach demands that experiences of women are foregrounded in the research process, examines various ways that they have been oppressed and marginalized, considers how this oppression manifests in the lives of women due intersectionality, and calls for the promotion of theories and practices that critique and combat both gender and racial oppression (Wing, 2003; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010)

In this study I use a CRF methodological approach to explore how Black women are represented in the children's literature about slavery featured in this study to discover what these renderings reveal about the intersection of race, gender, and class, and to consider what the texts are doing in the world. So essentially, in my exploration of the representation of slavery in children's literature I add gender as a unit of analysis and examine how this ideology works with race and class or not in representations of the institution that exists in the children's books in my text collection.

It is important to note that although a number of scholars and critics have considered gender along with race in their analysis of neo-slave narratives written for adults, few scholars have explored gender related issues in their research about neo-slave narratives written for children. This inattention has contributed to the limited focus on the Black female experience in the world of children's literature and is another example of women of color and their experiences residing in the margins in research (Hinton, 2008). Recognizing this and drawing on the tenets of CRF, this study serves as a small act in the long and continued struggle for the recognition of the women of color in the academy and the world. To this end, this study seeks to contribute to the small body of scholarship that focuses on gender and race in neo-slave narratives written for children by exploring how the children's books featured in this study either illustrate or ignore the multifarious experiences of Black women who lived under slavery.

Specifically, I begin my CRF analysis by examining how the creators of the picture books featured in this study represent Black women in the narratives about slavery presented in these texts. According to a CRF methodological approach, focusing on the representation of Black women is important because for far too long they have been marginalized, silenced, and disempowered (Crenshaw, 1989).

Beyond foregrounding the representation of Black women in my examination of their picture books I also draw on another tenet of a CRF methodological approach by placing the examination of construction Black womanhood in their texts at the center of the analysis. In examining the representation of Black women in their texts I consider how this presentation is different from the representation of Black male slaves and Whites in the books in my text collection. This consideration includes whether they place

issues unique to female slaves living under slavery. Do they focus on issues such as pregnancy, sexual harassment, sexism, miscegenation, or gender-specific work tasks? If so, how? And do the female characters tell their own story, have agency, act as subjects, or are helpless and invisible?

The examination of the construction of Black womanhood in children's literature about slavery created by Black women provides the context and lens that is used in subsequent intertextual readings that involves the juxtaposition of their representations of the female slave to overwhelmingly male focused research studies that exist in the early historiography of the institution. In my intertextual readings I consider how the picture books featured in this study engage with the representations of the female slave that is presented by early twentieth century historians like Stanley Elkins and U. B. Phillips? Do they recast, reinvent, or re-inscribe their representations? Furthermore, can we view their works as counter narratives? If yes, how? Do they represent the experiences of women whose stories have never been or are rarely told? Can they be viewed as texts that critique and address the narrow views that exist in masculinist stories about history? Again, if yes, how? Do they challenge dominant stories about womanhood and further the struggle for gender equality?

In answering these questions, I also consider the construction of Black womanhood in the picture books in a sociopolitical and historical context. How did the historical and sociopolitical climate in which their books were produced shape their worded and illustrated representations of female slaves? And what do these texts reveal about the intersection of race, gender, and class in the United States? I also write about



what their books are doing in the world by considering what messages about race, gender, and class exists in the book reviews, research, and other literature about these texts.

### **Critical Multicultural Analysis: Reading How Power is Exercised**

Critical Multicultural Analysis is a recursive process of analysis that asks readers to employ a multilayered lens to explore how gender and class and race work alongside the power relations in the texts. CMA demands that readers engage in the recursive reading of text that is guided by key questions. In conducting critical multicultural analysis of children's literature CMA requires that readers must first begin with focalization of the story, which is at the center of the theory's multilayered lens.

According to CMA, children's books are social constructs that offer a selective version of reality. [They are] told from a particular focalization or viewpoint" (Botelho & Rudman, 2009, p. 8). Informed by narrative theorists, CMA proposes that analysis of focalization offers important insights into "particular subject positions that are linked to the discourses and ideologies of race, class, and gender" (Botelho & Rudman, 2009, p. 120).

Botelho (2004) writes that "we must examine the focalization of a story because it foregrounds the process by which the perspective is told" (p.124). In the study, focalization is determined by considering the point of view from which the story is told. In essence, in my CMA analysis of the feature picture books I begin with an analysis of the principal ways in which the writer constructed the reading subject position. Is it a first or third person narrative? Is the story presented using single or multiple points of view? What subject reading positions are offered by the text? Who speaks and who is silenced? Moreover, what relationship exists between point of view, race, class, gender, and power in the story?

After analyzing point of view, Botelho and Rudman (2009) propose that it is important to consider social processes of the characters as well as the closure of the story. CMA demands a careful examination of the characters in the text to look at how social processes, communication amongst the characters within the plot are portrayed. Botelho (2004) notes that looking at characters social relations provides readers with important insights “into how the story is being told and not just what is being told” (p. 125). She also asserts that “story closures can be ideologically powerful since they reveal significance of the story and are culturally constructed” (p. 125). The ending of the story reasserts or contests what society views as important concerns or outcomes. According to CMA, stories also exist on a continuum that exists between fixed and open. Furthermore, Botelho (2004) writes that, they are shaped by the reader’s subjectivity [and that] what the reader brings to the text will inform the interpretation of closure” (p.125). Fixed story endings are supposed to provide “a sense of completeness and lead the reader to affirm the conclusions drawn (Botelho, 2004, p. 125). In contrast, open endings may leave the reader feeling unsure, providing the reader with the possibility for pondering about or challenging the significance of the story. To determine the social processes among the characters in the featured text and closure, I considered the following questions:

1. How are the power relations of race, gender, and class enacted between the characters?
2. Who has agency?
3. Who resist and challenges domination and collusion?
4. Who is acted upon?
5. Who waits?

6. How did the writer close the story?
7. What are the assumptions embedded in the closure of the story?
8. Is the ending ideologically open or closed?

In carrying out a critical multicultural research approach the next layer of analysis requires an “examination of the historical, sociopolitical, and discursive forces that have been presented in the texts.” (p. 120). Here, CMA draws on Norman Fairclough’s (1992) three-dimension process of discourse analysis, which examines discursive products (texts), discursive practices (production and interpretation), and social practices and contexts. To Fairclough, this three dimensional process highlights the dialectical relationship between structure and social practice and argues that we should not “overemphasize on the one hand the social determination of discourse [language use as a social practice], and on the other the construction of discourse” (p. 65). Instead, he suggests that we read discourse as both constructed by, and constitutive, of social structures. What follows is that ideology is located both in structure and in the practices or events as they unfold.

Guided by this analytic approach CMA demands that researchers explore how discursive practices construct social processes and play a role in maintaining raced, gendered, and classed power relations and structures. By locating and analyzing how texts draw on other literary and non-literary texts, as well as how discourses draw on each other, Botelho and Rudman (2009) argue that the representation of race, gender, class, and power (and how they work together) can be thoroughly explored. Botelho and Rudman also note that in their critical multicultural analysis of children’s texts their unit of analysis is “determined by shift in language use due to time, place, character, events or

perspective changes. They argue that is important to “discern how discursive practices or language uses social practices or relations by enacting the subject positions of dominator, colluder, resister, and/or agent” (p. 120).

Critical multicultural analysis also demands that readers consider how genre positions the characters and the reader. It requires that reader analyze what subject positions are offered by each genre. Botelho (2004) notes that genre plays a role in shaping the reader’s perception of texts. According to Botelho, the “deconstruction and reconstruction of genre unmask power as well as speculates on its redistribution” (p. 130). She points out that it is important to consider how the conventions of a particular story mask the messages or power relations in the story. Furthermore she writes that, genres are one way to control human discourse and manage ideology [and that] they are the material representation of ideology” (p.130). However, genres are also sites where resistance and struggle occurs as writers experiment or try out genre blurring. In other words, CMA requires that readers analyze the way in which various genres control the author and reader. Does the source of meaning lie with the genre?

Therefore, because this study features historical fiction that represents slavery a consideration of how this genre controls the author and reader is explored. Because this genre demands that writers and illustrators draw on historical studies and artifacts in an effort to represent the past, there is consideration of the ways in which the featured texts engage with the historiography of slavery. However, although all the books featured in the study are classified as historical fiction, they are also all hybrid texts. Botelho (2004) writes that there is no pure text and that “all texts are hybrids because they blend several generic forms together” (p. 145). She also writes that “any genre can contain or be a

mixture of several genres” (p.129). Because they are hybrid-texts, I also consider the ways other genres influence the representation of slavery that exists in each of the books in my text collection.

For example, because *Freedom-a Callin me* (2012), *I Want to be Free* (2009), *I Lay My Stitches Down* (2009), and *Sojourner Step-Stomp Stride* (2009), all contain rhyming verse and use spare language and symbolism in place of complete phrases or sentences, there is analysis of the role that the conventions of the genre of poetry plays in shaping the representation of slavery in these texts.. Because *Moses: When Harriet Tubman led her People to Freedom* (2006) and *Sojourner Step-Stomp Stride* (2009) are classified as biographies and *Heart and Soul: the Story of African Americans* (2011) is categorized as a non-fiction text, how each of these sub-genres may have shaped these picture books is considered. Moreover, because all of the texts featured in this study are picture books there is also consideration of how the conventions of this genre influence how slavery is presented in the texts.

The last two layers of critical multicultural analysis examine the sociopolitical and historical context of the text. They propose that to discover how picture books engage in and respond to a sociopolitical and historical context it is important to consider the following questions:

Sociopolitical context:

1. What cultural statement(s) is the book(s) responding to?
2. What dominant messages about race, gender, and class, are imbedded in the book reviews, research, and literature about the book(s) that are being studied?
3. What is the specific sociopolitical context of the cultural theme presented in the text(s)?

Historical context:

1. What is the specific historical context of the cultural theme presented in the text(s)?
2. How is the historical development of ideologies about and discourses of race, gender, and class translated in the book(s) being studied?
3. In what ways do the discourses of the country that the text represents and is produced in prevail in the text(s)?

The practices of critical multicultural analysis described above have been instructive to this study. It has informed the exploration of how race, gender, and class is represented in the children's books about slavery featured in this study. In the analysis of these texts I employ the critical multicultural analytic lens that foregrounds focalization, social processes of characters, genre, closure of story, as well as the sociopolitical and historical context. By using this multilayered lens I specifically explore how the texts have been shaped by contemporary discourse about interracial collaboration and race relations in the United States. I also analyze how these texts respond to and engage with historical research studies that focus on gender, race, and class during slavery times. The discussion of this text also includes an exploration of how gender, race, and class ideologies are presented to make readers aware of how power worked not only during slavery times but also in the present. The examination of children's books about slavery featured in this study is also guided by this approach as the analysis of these texts also focuses on the historical and sociopolitical context in which they were produced and explores the social processes of the characters in these texts. When examining children's books about slavery in this study I identify words or illustrated actions that suggest the type of power of the power continuum of CMA that was outlined in Chapter 2.

I use critical multicultural analysis to examine the relationship between race, gender, and class in these texts on a power continuum. As noted in Chapter 2, CMA power is examined on a continuum of domination, collusion, resistance, and agency. Drawing on this approach, each of the children's picture books in this study is examined using a three prong approach that features the exercise of power among the characters. In conducting this analysis, first, I examine the character's actions concerning how power is exercised by identifying it on the continuum of domination through agency. Second, I identify which characters benefit from power and how this occurs in the text. Third, I explore which characters are disadvantaged from power and how this comes about. Following the analysis of this power continuum in the texts a discussion about how this scenario represents slavery and implications for readers and society is presented. Specifically, the analysis of power in the children's literature texts featured in this study also serves as data in my discussion about whether the books could be read as counter-narratives that challenge the earlier representations of slavery as kind and paternalistic institution with submissive, docile and contented slaves.

### **Picture Book Codes: Reading Images**

Because this study features picture books about slavery, an additional approach is used as part of the analysis that takes place in this dissertation. This approach draws upon scholarship published in the past three decades about picture books (Arizpe & Styles, 2003; Nikolajeva, 2001; Nodelman, 1988; Moebius, 1986, Sipe, 1998). Lawrence Sipe (1998) has pointed out that it is important for researchers and readers to consider the various ways that text and pictures work together to render meaning in picture books. He asserts that the "essence of the picture book is the way that texts and illustrations work

with each other [and notes] that this relationship between the two kinds of text-visual and verbal is complicated and subtle” (Sipe 1998, p. 97). A number of other scholars have written about the relationship between words and images and have offered approaches to help readers examine these relationships in texts such as picture books and graphic novels (Cohn; 2003; Lemke, 1993, Moebius, 1986; McCloud, 1999; Murray, 1997; Nodelman, 1988; Sadoski & Pavio, 1994). This scholarship provides guidance about how readers integrate visual and verbal signs in picture books to make meaning and literary interpretation. Lawrence Sipe (1998) has noted “that clearly, the richest understanding involves responding to all the information, both visual and verbal, in all parts of [a picture] book” (p.122).

Along with focusing on how readers construct meaning from the interplay between words and images in texts such as comics, picture books, and graphic novels, there have been also growing body of scholarship that focuses on the interpretation of the images in children’s books in isolation (Cohn; 2003; Nodelman, 1988; Schwarz, 2002; Seglem & Witte, 2009). This body of scholarship builds upon the body of visual literacy research that posits that the nature of literacy has changed because reading the text involves reading words and visual images (Friere & Macedo, 1987). Currently there are many scholars who argue that the reading of pictures is a complex and multifaceted act. Sequential art scholars such as Scott McCloud (1999), Chris Murray (1997), and Lila Christensen (2006) has written extensively about visual literacy in comics and graphic novels. Other children’s literature scholars such as Evelyn Arizpe and Morag Styles (2003), Barbara Keifer (1993), Daniel Lewis (2001), William Moebius (1986), and



Maureen Walsh (2003) have explored how readers can make meaning from the illustrations found in picture books.

Indeed, the last few decades have generated scholarship that explores the ‘reading’ of visuals in children’s literature (Anstey & Bull, 2000; Callow, 1999; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996; Michaels & Walsh 1990; Unsworth, 2001). These studies “have revealed the complex nature of visual semiotics of pictorial texts with different theoretical positions developed” (Walsh, 2003, p.123) and as Anstey and Bull (2000) have pointed out, the images contained in children’s books have multiple meanings and discourses. Furthermore, this scholarship contends that the reading of images involves quite a different process from the reading of words (Kress, 1997/2000) and that in the current context of living in an age where young people are being bombarded with images there is a need for scholarship that examines how we make meaning from images. Today, there is a continually growing group of scholars who believe that because reading of pictures or images is composite, intricate, and important act that discloses much there is a need for frameworks or approaches that help us to interpret the messages that they render to readers.

Since I agree that reading of picture books is a complex and multifaceted act, the analysis of the illustrations found in the picture books about slavery found in this dissertation is guided by the work of my dissertation committee member William Moebius (1986). Moebius was among the first scholars to attend to the intricacies of reading pictures in literature for children. He notes that no approach to picture books can overlook the importance of their design and provides a method to help readers conduct research according to the demands of these specific texts. Moebius indicates that there

are five different and distinct codes that should be used when analyzing picture books. Those codes are the code of position, size, and diminishing return; the code of perspective; the code of the frame and the right and round; the code of line and capillarity; and the code of color. Each code speaks of a different aspect of the image and how it imparts various messages. In the code of position and diminishing returns, Moebius points out that the position of the character on the page inform the reader how the illustrator wants to portray the character. For instance, the height on a page may signal many various meanings. "It may be an indication of an ecstatic condition, dream-vision, mark of social status, or of a positive self-image. [In contrast], being low on the page is often a signal of low spirits or of unfavorable social status" (p.317). Furthermore, figures represented in picture books may be strengthened or weakened depending on whether they are centered or in the margin, appear close up, appear large or small, or are presented in more than one scene on a page.

Moebius also believes that a consideration of perspective is important in understanding picture books. He advises that it is important for readers to follow the existence or absence of horizon or horizontals, vanishing points, and contrast between facades and depths. To Moebius, the psychology of a character can be gleaned by analyzing perspective. He argues that "a character located within a two dimensional space is less likely to be open-minded [and] less able to give imaginative scope to desire that one pictured within three-dimensional depth" (p.317).

According to Moebius, the code of the frame also reveals details of the psychology of a character in a picture book. He writes that a character framed in a series of circular enclosures is more likely to be secure and content than one framed in a series

of utterly rectangular objects. He also notes that an emphasis on rectangular shapes is coupled with a problem or an encounter with the disadvantages of disciplined or civilized life.

Moebius's codes for understanding picture books continue with line, capillary, and color. He points out "the intensity of a character's experience is represented by the thickness or thinness of lines, by their smoothness or jaggedness, by their sheer number or profusion, or by their sparseness, and by whether they run parallel to each other or at sharp angles" (p. 318). He notes that jagged lines usually equal troubled emotions or endangered life in a character and cross hatchings equate to nervousness.

Concerning color, Moebius notes that they signal a character's mood. Bright colors signal exhilaration and discovery, and dark colors signify disappointment and confusion. Additionally, color can be used to draw one's eye to certain elements of an image. It affects the mood and emotional image an image, and is often associated with particular meaning in various cultures. In my analysis of the representation of slavery in the illustrations of picture books I draw on Moebius' codes of position, size, and color to explore how slavery has been rendered through illustrations. In essence, I examine artistic devices such as color, position of character within an illustration, and the size of a character to discover how slavery is being rendered in the illustrations found in the picture books featured in this study. Regarding my analysis of color in these texts, the list below outlines the culturally shaped meaning potentials (they are not inherent to the colors) that I associated with primary and secondary colors:

1. *Red*: power, warmth, anger, energy, activity.
2. *Green*: nature, cool, calming.

3. *Blue*: restful, detached, serenity, melancholy, passivity.
4. *Yellow*: happiness, caution, warmth.
5. *Black*: scary, dark moods, night, depressing, disappointment confusion.
6. *White*: enlightenment, freedom, openness, exhilaration, discovery.

Additionally, in my analysis of the illustrations in this study I pay keen attention to one of the tools that many contemporary illustrators rely on to portray strong characters in picture books (Prior & Wilson, 2012). In this study, I examine pictorial content, such as character actions, facial expressions, body posture, character relationships, and symbols to explore how illustrators have represented the institution of slavery. Although an exhaustive inventory of illustrator tools and techniques are not used in my analysis of the illustrations found in the picture books featured in the study, I have chosen to explore some of the most common device used to render characters and to represent settings through illustrations in picture books. The decision is based on the on the fact that a number of researchers have found attending to pictorial content such as facial expressions and body posture and artistic devices such as color is the one way that most children read picture book illustrations (Feathers & Arya, 2012).

### **Historical Fiction**

I chose to use historical fiction for this dissertation because as the young adult literature writer Edwidge Danticat (2013), notes this genre of text that “can illuminate much about what life was like in the past and in many ways it serves as a magnifying glass on a historical period” (Danticat Other People Podcast Interview, September 25, 2013). Moreover, Botelho and Rudman (2009) assert sometimes “historical fiction provides more truth (as opposed to a collection of facts) than a work of nonfiction about

the same era” (p. 209) Throughout the past few decades a number of scholars have written about the representation of the past through historical fiction (Apol, Sakuma, Reynolds, & Rop, 2002; McGillis, 1998; White, 2005; Rahn, 1991).

Beyond solely exploring how the past is represented in historical fiction, many of these scholars have pointed out that like all literature, historical fiction acts as a powerful socializing force that seeks to situate readers within the realities it creates (Hollindale, 1988; McGillis, 1998; McLaren, 1988; Scheweikart, 1986). Even more, as Apol, Sakuma, Reynolds, and Rop (2002) note that it seeks not only to represent, recast, and recast history, but the genre also seeks to situate reader within the realities it creates. “Specifically, it serves to construct history from a particular vantage point. It creates and inscribes a past that both shapes and is shaped by the present and the future” (Apol, Sakuma, Reynolds, & Rop, 2002, p. 431). Furthermore, as Apol (1998) points out, historical fiction represents an important arena of political struggle where versions of the past are constructed that are used to render explicit and implicit ideologies.

Many scholars have analyzed ideologies in neo-slave narratives written for adults. In fact, this dissertation draws on the rich body of research that explores what adult historical fiction about slavery is doing in the world. For example, Elizabeth Ann Beaulieu (1999) and Angelyn Mitchell (2001) have written about how Black female writers such as Octavia Butler (1980), Toni Morrison (1987), Joan California Copper (1991, and Sherley Anne Williams (1996) have used neo-slave narratives to compensate for the limited and racist representation of women in the historiography of slavery. Drawing on a critical race feminist framework, Beaulieu and Mitchell have explored the intertextual relationship between Black women’s fiction about slavery and the early

historiography of the institution. They have also argued that through their historical fiction about slavery Black female novelists during the 1980s and 1990s have helped to contribute to the discourse about Black women both in the slave past and in contemporary times.

Ashraf Rushdy (1999) has also looked at what contemporary neo-slave narratives written for adults are doing in the context in which they were conceived and published. Specifically, Rushdy focuses on the influence that historical scholarship and the Civil Rights and Black Power movements had on shaping the representation of slavery Ishmael Reed's (1998) *Flight to Canada*, Sherley Anne Williams's (1999) *Dessa Rose* , and Charles Johnson's (1982) *Oxherding Tale* and Tom Feelings' (1998) *Middle Passage* . To Rushdy, these four neo-slave narratives engage in a dialogue with seminal historical scholarship about the nature of slavery and connects their engagement to various strategies (such as self-determination and representation) that were employed by activists during the Civil Rights and Black Power movements to promote social and political change in the United States. He writes that these texts draw on intertextuality to evaluate ideologies of identity, property, and violence found in the discourses about slavery in the United States and notes that they each offer perspectives about race and power. Rushy also claims that socio-cultural and academic landscape in of the 1960s, which included a keen interest by New Left historians to write about slave testimony and resistance and to study the institution from the bottom up, informed the historical representation of the institution found in these books.

Drawing on the scholarship described above and influenced by the assertion that historical fiction is an arena where overt and subtle agendas are perpetrated, I was

interested in examining what types of ideologies are rendered in children's literature about slavery. Additionally, because much work has been done using this lens with adult literature about slavery and much less research has been conducted using the same lens with children's literature about slavery, I believe that this work will be guiding to readers of children's literature about slavery. Indeed, if children's literature about slavery is a arena where covert and overt messages and agendas are rendered then it important to shine a spotlight on them and stress that it is critical that all readers of historical fiction about slavery recognize that ideology is at work in these texts. It is because of this that I chose to feature historical fiction in this study.

However, while historical fiction and picture books are the dominant genres featured in my text collection, as noted earlier, because they are hybrid texts, the books have also been shaped by the conventions of poetry, biography, and non-fiction. In the sections below a discussion of these genres is presented.

### **Poetry**

Because its musical quality draws in the reader by appealing to their senses, emotions, sociopolitical leanings a number of scholars have noted that poetry offers a way of seeing and hearing in the world that other literature cannot (Botelho, 2004; Hunt, 1992). It is important to consider the genre of poetry because *Freedom-a Callin me* (2012), *I Want To be Free* (2009), *I Lay My Stitches Down* (2009), and *Sojourner Step-Stomp Stride* (2009) all draw on its conventions in their representations of slavery.

Maria José Botelho (2004) writes that, "poetry more than any other genre, requires readers to pay attention to language" (p.118). Moreover, she notes that while poetry is the least restrictive in terms of content, it can be the most in regards to format.

Additionally, she notes that while it can be “light or heavy [the] language must be distilled to its barest possible essence” (p. 118). However, while there are a number of poetic forms (ballade, blank verse, epic, epigram, free verse, limerick, lyric, and sonnet) that are shaped by specific conventions, many poets are pushing the boundaries of poetic forms and taking the genre in new directions. The pushing of the poetic forms is particularly on display in the world of children’s literature. Ted Klessner (2012) has noted that this phenomenon has become increasingly prevalent in the world of non-fiction picture books written for readers at the elementary school level and Elizabeth Bird (2014) has written about the new ways that writers and illustrators are using image and text to present poetic narratives to young readers.

Peter Hunt (1992) points out that of all the genres, poetry is the one that challenges our understanding and demands much analysis. Botelho (2004) writes that “it asks the reader to consider multiple meaning instead of a single meaning and [requires that they] examine social processes among characters from multiple angles” (p.119). She notes that words, phrase, images, and ideas all convey different shades of meaning and a range of feelings. She also adds that the genre require careful analysis of every word, each syllable, of every line break, and of each line break. To explicate meaning from poetry, Diane Mitchell (2003) notes that a consideration of image, rhyme, rhythm, sound devices, sensory details, figurative devices, line breaks, repetition, and compact knowledge is important. In essence, because this study features four books in which authors are drawing on the conventions of poetry, the issues considered in the previous paragraph are important in the CMA analysis of these texts.



## Biography

*Moses: When Harriet Tubman led her People to Freedom* (2006) and *Sojourner Truth's Step-Stomp Stride* (2009) are classified as picture book biographies for children. It is important to discuss the genre of biography in effort to consider whether or not the two texts draw on conventions that have defined by African American biographies written for children. African American history for children has been represented in scores of biographies and works of bibliographic fiction (Sims Bishop, 2007). Rudine Sims Bishop (2007) writes that African American biographies have been a significant part of African American children's literature for decades. She also points out that in recent years, many biographies, both fictionalized and authentic, have appeared in picture book format and have therefore been more accessible and appealing to a wider audience. This phenomenon has certainly been the case in the representation of slavery as a steady flow of biography about Black slave characters continues to be published.

Paula Connolly (2013) has noted that slave biographies for children (Nonfiction and Fictionalized) have primarily focused on a few figures, particularly Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, and Sojourner Truth. Sims Bishop (2004) has asserted that the overwhelming focus of these historical figures in African American biographies has emerged because African American writers and illustrators, for the most part, have represented Black heroes in texts as a way to expand upon the limited focus of children's education beyond the histories of White Americans.

Connolly (2013) has added that perhaps the trajectory of the life stories of Douglass, Tubman, and Truth, as activists, who that battled oppression from slavery to freedom, has influenced the decision that children's authors and illustrators have made to

recast their lives for young readers. The fact that they are viewed, for the most part, as heroes or models of bravery in public memory and history (evidenced by their appearance in museum paintings, textbooks, stamps, statues) may also play a role in interest that they receive from children's books creators.

Because an overwhelming majority of slave biographies focus on this select group, they have run the risk of establishing a narrow canon, one which exclusively follows the "acceptable" life trajectory of the slave from enslavement, to freedom, and lauded national contribution (Connolly, 2013). In my analysis of *Moses: When Harriet Tubman led her People to Freedom* (2006) and *Sojourner Truth's Step-Stomp Stride* (2009), I will explore whether the main characters in these text follow this "acceptable" life trajectory.

Representations of slavery through biography are shaped as much by the choice of biological subject as by how the biographer chooses to sculpt the subject's life story (Connolly, 2013). Connolly (2013) writes that in the case of the Douglass, Tubman, and Truth slave biographies, they are represented in narratives where they recount episodes from their childhood. She notes that the choice "seems to be intended to engender identify and sympathy among young readers" (p. 197).

In slave biographies for children, an escape to freedom and an attempt to help others escape from slavery often serve as the story's crux. Connolly (2013) has written that they function, as did similar episodes in antebellum narratives, to engender a sense of adventure that would pique reader interest. Sims Bishop (2007) has shared that these texts seek to represent slavery from the perspective of the enslaved and reveal that Blacks

living under slavery had a strong desire to escape, despite the great risk of personal injury,

## **Nonfiction**

A consideration of the nonfiction genre is important because *Heart and Soul: the Story of African Americans* (2011) is considered a historical nonfiction text. Historical nonfiction is a sub-genre that provides accounts of historical events, involving people, and what happened to them as well as their actions. It also can include the explanation from the occurrence of the events and their significant and consequences. It is focused on the events and people from a particular time and place. Nonfiction accounts are often written from the perspective of the author sifting evidence to present an interpretation that addresses a significant question of the human experience. Implied in historical nonfiction writing is that the writing spends time with historical sources in an effort to represent the past in accurate and authentic manner. “Implied in nonfiction is that there is a reality out there that can be captured with language [and that] language is stable” (Botelho, 2004, p. 123)

Historical nonfiction is often evaluated on the based on the accuracy of the historical material contained in the text. Is the information accurate? Is the narrative authentic? In other words, does it incorporate specific details about the time and place in which the story is set? Are there omissions, stereotypes, or simplification that could distort the readers understanding of a particular time period or event? Were credible sources used?

However, it is important to note that the theoretical framework that this study draws upon problematizes the concept or idea of authenticity. Every author brings his or

her values or perspective to a story. Few narratives are completely accurate and a writer and illustrator cannot take into account every relevant perspective. Moreover, just like literature the “credible” sources that are used by writers and illustrators to construct historical non-fiction are also shaped by the authors who also had their own values and perspectives.

I agree with Botelho (2004) who notes that the important consideration of historical non-fiction text lies with the analysis of the ways in which they narrate culture and power relations. The authority or credibility of non-fiction text “is dependent on the agreement among the participants, the writer and the reader. It is not concerned with historical sedimentation of language. These texts are constructed like literary ones, woven with the discourses that circulate in society (p. 123).

### **Book Selection: Classroom Matters**

Selecting children’s books about slavery is an important part of the design of this study. As a teacher educator who focuses on the teaching of history in public schools, I wanted to select books that have been recommended for classroom by school districts in the United States. I also want to explore the representation of slavery in the picture books in my text collection, so that I could share my findings with my own students who may use some of these recommended books to teach about the history of slavery. Beyond these classroom matters, I also wanted to find picture books about slavery that featured both slaves and slave masters, and overseers and because of my use of the CRF lens it was imperative to include books in the text collection that contained Black female characters

I began by looking for books that met the criteria outlined in the previous paragraph, I examined the history and social studies frameworks and guides from Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut to find children's books about slavery that are recommended for classroom use in the social studies and English curriculum. After this I visited a number of blogs, online databases, and websites dedicated to children's literature. I visited book-selling websites such as Amazon, Barnes and Noble Booksellers, and Borders to search for children's literature by using the key words of slavery and children's books. Then I looked at several blogs such as Brown Bookshelf, Fledgling, Multiculturalism Rocks, and Reading in Color because all of them feature summaries and reviews of African American children's literature. After this, I searched children's literature journal via databases of the W. E. B. Du Bois Library portal at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Specifically, I explored the online databases of *Bookbird*, *Booklinks*, *Booklist*, and *Horn Book Magazine*. The search concluded with a search of the Comprehensive Children's Literature Database to consider the reviews of neo-slave narratives that written for children. These databases, blogs and websites contained summaries and book reviews that support the book selection process in this study. In the end, I decided to use nine recently published picture books about slavery, even though there are numerous picture books about the institution. I chose the picture books *Heart and Soul: The Story of African Americans* , *I Lay My Stitches Down* , *Moses: When Harriet Tubman Led Her People to Freedom*, *Sojourner Truth's Step-Stomp Stride*, *Freedom's a-Callin me*, and *Show Way* (2005) because the representation of the experiences of Black women and men under slavery are central to the storyline. I chose the *January's Sparrow*, *Night Running*, and *I Want to be Free* because they feature slave

owners and overseers as main characters. I also choose these nine picture books because they are used in classrooms, and have been created by highly successful children's book illustrators such as Rod Brown, E. B. Lewis, Kadir Nelson, Patricia Polacco, and Michele Wood.

Additionally, all the picture books featured in this study were chosen because they are currently a part of the curriculum in a number of school districts in the northeastern part of the United States and/or have been recognized by critics and scholars as noteworthy children's texts written in the tradition of the neo-slave narratives. They were also chosen because they explicitly engage with particular historical discourses about the treatment and social practices of the Black slave in a detailed manner. Although these are diverse representations, all the texts featured in this study focus on the social practices, treatment, and experiences of Black slaves under the institution of slavery. Furthermore, all of them in various ways take up issues such as contentment, paternalism, and resistance.

### **Establishing Trustworthiness**

Four methods to establish trustworthiness were used in this study. The first was prolonged engagement with the sources of data. This process involved through and repeated readings of the picture books and secondary sources over a period of several months. As, Frederick Erickson (2012) notes data is not data until you engage with it repeatedly. For example, the selected children's books were reread several times so that I could familiarize myself with them and make observations that I might not have been able to make had I read the books only once.

The second method was to triangulate the data to support my interpretations. For instance, I wanted to assert that Patricia Polacco's (2011) *January's Sparrow* effectively challenges the discourse of a kind or caring slave system by detailing the cruel treatment of slaves, so I used book reviews I located on the Comprehensive Children's Literature Database that supported this perspective. Third, to determine the credibility and clarity of this study I met with my advisors and corresponded with two scholars specializing in neo-slave narratives throughout the writing of this dissertation.

Over the course of a year periodic debriefings with these scholars played a significant role in bringing clarity to my arguments and to make this work credible. The final way that I established trustworthiness came in the form of consulting the following authoritative sources consistently: *Embracing, Evaluating, and Examining African American Children's and Young Adult Literature* (2008), *Shadow and Substance: African American Experience in Children's Fiction* (1982), *Free Within Ourselves: The Development of African American Children's Literature* (2007), *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature* (1997), *Neo-Slave Narrative: Studies in the Social Logic of a Literary Form* (1999), *The Freedom to Remember* (1999), and *Critical Multicultural Analysis of Children's Literature: Mirrors Windows, and Doors* (2009). Furthermore, because the historical studies were an integral part of this intertextual work done in this study, beyond the work of Elkins and Phillips, I also read many influential studies about slavery and the historiography of the institution (see Chapter 2).

### **Limitations of the Study**

This dissertation is primarily based on analysis of picture books about slavery. I am aware that one of the limitations of text analysis derives from the fact that meaning is

constructed from engagement between the reader and the text (Rosenblatt, 1995). Furthermore, as Krippendorf (2004) points out, “a text does not exist without a reader, a message does not exist without an interpreter, and data does not exist without an observer” (p. 138). Accordingly, other readers may interpret the texts used in this study differently from this researcher. For this reason, the findings are at times triangulated with critical reviews, analysis by other scholars, and comments from the writers and illustrators about the messages that they hoped to convey in their texts. While this approach does not resolve the limitation, it attempts to provide comprehensive, clear, and interdisciplinary textual analyses through this study (Thurmond, 2001).

Furthermore, as Frederick Erickson (2012) notes, I am aware that because there was a self imposed timeline on this study there may have been some temptation to neatly grab on to theory and move towards closure and that this study could benefit from additionally redirected gazes and revisiting of the data. As with many studies, the more time spent with the data the more findings may be revealed. However, as I moved toward the end of my dissertation studies, the years spent with the data proved to be enough for me to draw out some humble inferences. Maybe in future years, I will revisit my data set, knowing that more findings can certainly be noticed.

Additionally, although there have been many picture books about slavery published throughout the past four decades, only a small sample of these texts are analyzed in this study. This research project could have benefited from the incorporation of more picture books or young adult novels about slavery. While a study that incorporates more texts could be considered more comprehensive, I choose to focus my analysis primarily on small collection of children’s picture about slavery that teachers are



using in contemporary classrooms in Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, and New Jersey. Furthermore, the main aim of this study is to explore new approaches for analyzing, which may inform classroom teaching and the research of children's literature.

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## CHAPTER IV

### DATA AND ANALYSIS

“Literature can serve as a magnifying glass on a historical event or period”  
— Danticat (2013)

This chapter explores how the nine picture books featured in this study engage with historical claims about the slavery that exist in the early historiography of slavery and examines how gender, class, and race work alongside these power relations in these texts. In this chapter, I turn my attention to the micro-interactions in the picture books to explore how writers and illustrators circulate, maintain, interrupt, and transform these power relations in their representations of slavery. In the sections that follow I write about the production practices and provide a summary of each text. Then, I analyze the exercise of power among the characters and present a critical examination of class, race, and gender. I also consider how focalization, social processes among characters, story closure, genre, production practices, and the early historiography of slavery have shaped the representations of institution that appear in the picture books that make up my text collection.

#### **Production practices of *Sojourner Truth Step-Stomp Stride***

*Sojourner Truth's Step-Stomp Stride*, written by Andrea Davis Pinkney (2009) and illustrated by Brian Pinkney, has been recognized as an excellent addition to any classroom collection seeking to add more historical representations of Black women, abolitionists, and pioneer feminists (Talcroft, 2009). This biography, which was published by Jump at the Sun Books, is composed of 32 pages and is presented in a traditional picture book format. The book has been classified as an early grade level text (Kindergarten-4th grade) and has won a number of awards and honors which include the

Cooperative Children Book Center Best Book Award in 2010 and the Jane Addams Children's Book Award for the same year. The Jane Addams Children's Book Awards are given annually to children's books that effectively promote peace, social justice, world community, and the equality of the sexes and all races.

*Sojourner Truth's Step-Stomp Stride* creators are an African-American wife-and-husband team. They have worked on several books together. The Pinkneys have created a number of picture books that represent different events and time periods of Black history in the United States because they are committed to providing images of strong Black people in their children books. These texts include *Alvin Ailey* (1993), *Billy Pickett, Rodeo-Ridin' Cowboy* (1996), *Boycott Blues: How Rosa Parks Inspired a Nation* (2008), *Dear Benjamin Banneker* (1994), *Duke Ellington: The Piano Prince and his Orchestra* (2006), *Ella Fitzgerald: A Tale of a Vocal Virtuosa* (2003), *Hand in Hand: Ten Men Who Changed America* (2012), *Martin and Mahalia: His Words Her Song* (2013), and *Sit-in: How Four Friends Stood up by Sitting Down* (2010). In 2013, the Andrea and Brian Pinkney were recognized by the Library of Congress at the National Book festival for their positive representations of Black people in their picture books. During the festival Carol Rappaport (2013) noted that their work counters racist stereotypes of Black people that were once prevalent and are still present in the United States.

Andrea Davis Pinkney has also been recognized as an acclaimed writer of informational texts for children that focus on social equality. She is viewed in the world of children's literature as a writer who is deeply committed to creating texts that celebrate the Black experience (Rappaport, 2013). Pinkney, who brands herself as a product of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, has stated that her commitment to this type of

work began when she noticed a lack of African-American children's literature. Because of the relatively small body of African American children's literature, Davis Pinkney decided to create children's texts that would reflect the lives, cultural heritage, and the achievements of African-American figures. She also wanted the texts that she created to express the theme that even when faced with obstacles any African American can attain their goals with intelligence and hard work. As a writer of more than 30 children's books and vice president and executive editor of Scholastic books, Davis Pinkney is well known for her fierce commitment to presenting positive depictions of Blacks from history to young people through children's literature.

Similarly, Brian Pinkney, who is the son of the award-winning and acclaimed illustrator Jerry Pinkney, is also widely recognized as an artist who is committed to presenting positive images of Blacks in picture books. Beyond the texts that he has created with his wife, Brian is the illustrator of several other highly praised picture books. He is the illustrator of *The Dark Thirty* (1996), *I Have A Dream* (1997), *Cendrillon: A Caribbean Queen* (1998), *Jackie Bat* (2006), *The Faithful Friend* (1995), and *In the Time of the Drums* (1999). Brian Pinkney has won numerous awards for his illustrations in children's books. He has been awarded with two Caldecott Honors, five Coretta Scott King Awards, and a Boston Globe/Horn Book Award for his illustrations in picture books.

### **Summary of *Sojourner Truth's Step-Stomp Stride***

*Sojourner Truth's Step-Stomp Stride* depicts the life of Sojourner Truth from her childhood in slavery to her adult life as an abolitionist and women's rights activist. This picture book biography is written with lyrical text that seeks to capture the fiery spirit and

determination of Sojourner Truth. Andrea Davis Pinkney uses a storyteller style which features short sentences and fragments that creates rhythmic passages. It is a style that is often read like free verse poetry. Hazel Rochman (2009) notes that the storytelling style in the text certainly makes it a great read aloud for young children. She also believes that the style is one that that most young readers will find appealing.

Brian Pinkney's earthy toned oil painted illustrations also strongly contributes to the appeal of the text (Rochman, 2009). Earth tones dominate Brian Pinkney's sunlit paintings that are given loose definition by strong and inky brushstrokes. In *Sojourner Truth's Step-Stomp Stride* Truth is often shown surrounded by a golden glow and the illustrations of her throughout the text seem to consistently convey her charisma and conviction. Additionally, because the illustrations are in a palette of yellow that is alive with whirling lines, they support the active, lively, and rhythmic text that is presented by Davis Pinkney.

In constructing the text the Pinkneys did a significant amount of research about Sojourner Truth. This research involved the reading of a number of noteworthy historical texts that focus on her experiences in slavery and as an abolitionist. The Pinkneys included the texts that they read during their research in a section at the end of the text that is titled 'More about Sojourner Truth'. They include Thomas Frazier's *Collection of African American Primary Sources* (1979), which includes Truth's "Ain't I a Woman Speech", historian Peter Cross' biography titled *Sojourner Truth* (1988), and another biography that bears the same name by well known young adult nonfiction writers Patricia and Frederick McKissack. The Pinkneys also read *Black Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia* (1993), *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth* (1998), and *Notable*

*American Women 1607-1950* (1971).

### **Exercise of Power Among Characters**

*Sojourner Truth's Step-Stomp Stride* is told from the third-person point of view. In this text the narrator shares what the characters, Sojourner, slave master John Dumont, a Quaker couple, and an abolitionist named Olive see, think, feel, do, and observe. In this story, the reader is provided with an opportunity to gain much insight into the thoughts and feelings of the main character Sojourner Truth. While Pinkney provides the reader with some details about the lives of the other characters, it is Sojourner's thoughts, feelings, and observations that are featured prominently throughout the story. Pinkney's colloquial narrative and punchy poetic prose help to create an upbeat narrative about Sojourner's life

#### **Sojourner.**

As the story begins, Sojourner appears to be in a powerful position with some agency in the world. The first page of the book features an illustration of Sojourner (see Figure 1). She has a book in hand, there is a bag across her waist, and she has a stoic look upon her face. The framed image signals to readers that they are about to enter Sojourner's world of slavery and her visage and the yellowish color of the reader hint at the inner strength and warmth of the character. The image hints at Sojourner's commitment to helping bring an end to slavery through travels that will take her to places where she will tell the truth about slavery. Beneath this picture, Davis Pinkney writes that, "She was big. She was black. She was so beautiful [and] her name was Sojourner" (p. 1). Furthermore, she continues, "She was meant for great things. Meant for speaking. Meant for preaching. Meant for teaching the truth about freedom. Big. Black. Beautiful.

True. That was Sojourner” (p. 1).



*Figure 1. Illustration by Brian Pinkney from Sojourner's Truth Step-Stomp Stride.*

In opening the text in this way, the Pinkneys evoke a few of the central motifs of the antebellum slave narrative that seek to show Sojourner's power and agency. Similar to antebellum slave narratives, the Pinkneys begin *Sojourner's Step-Stomp Stride* with an illustrated portrait of and identifying details about the Black slave. In antebellum slave narratives and this text, these framing devices seeks to signal to the reader that the Black slave's experience will be at the center of the representation of slavery that is presented within the pages of the book. According the Paula Connolly (2013), these framing devices help to reclaim the slave's perspective as the prominent one in accounts about slavery. In essence, beginning books about slavery with a picture that represents details about the Black slave serves to propel them into a powerful place in narrative about the institution.

The language that Davis Pinkney uses at the beginning of the text also draws upon the discourse that was often used by Black activists and artists during the Black Arts, Black Power, and Civil Rights movements. The significant messages of Black beauty, agency and strength which were put forth during these movements and that are on display at the beginning of *Sojourner Truth's Step-Stomp Stride*. On the first page, the reader is presented with a picture and text, which represent Sojourner as a person who is "Black,

Beautiful, True” (p. 1) and meant to do many “great things” (p. 1) in the world, positioning her as a character with agency. Throughout the text, Sojourner remains in this position as the narrative is driven by her various acts of resistance throughout her lifetime.

The representation of this resistance appears almost immediately in the story.. At beginning of the narrative Sojourner is positioned as a victim because she is enslaved. However, as the story progresses she becomes a resister when she escapes and then becomes an abolitionist. In the first part of the narrative because she is suffering under “the ugly way of slavery” (p. 7), Sojourner is positioned as a victim: “She is sold away from her parents when she is nine years old and then sold to two more masters after that” (p. 7). When she arrives at her final stop into slavery away from her parents, she is forced to “shuck, boil, haul, and work all day for her master John Dumont” (p. 7).

Although Sojourner is positioned as a victim at this point in the narrative, she also is represented as someone who is not okay with her condition as a slave. In representing Sojourner as a slave was not okay with her status, the Pinkneys challenge the assertion that Black slaves were content with their lives under slavery. Davis Pinkney writes that she “hates being treated like property” (p. 7) and then illustrates that she was willing to do whatever she could to escape slavery.

Sojourner’s first attempt at escape comes after she recognizes that she has been manipulated by her master. In the story John Dumont promises her freedom if she works extra hard for him and because Sojourner “wants her freedom more than anything” (p. 8). “She polished Dumont’s brass until it gleamed. She mucked his horse stalls, [and] churned the Dumont family butter twice as fast” (p. 8). However, despite Sojourner’s



efforts when she visits John Dumont to request her freedom he does not honor his promise.

However, despite her master's manipulation Sojourner is not discouraged from her deep desire to find her way towards freedom. After this, Sojourner is positioned as a character who successfully resists slavery and becomes an agent of change. In the story arc, after John Dumont breaks his promise, Sojourner "decide[s] to run away" (p. 9). Even though the act of flight was a dangerous one for slaves that could end with harsh punishment and even death, Sojourner still takes the risk because of her deep desire to attain freedom. "She fled like tomorrow wasn't ever gonna come. She covered ground child. She got gone." (p. 9). In the text her flight is the first major act of resistance. However, it is not the last.

As the text progresses, Sojourner receives assistance from White resisters who help her to gain her legal freedom. It is through a series of acts carried out these White resisters that Sojourner meets during her flight towards freedom that she is able to successfully escape from master Dumont. In the narrative, on one page Davis Pinkney writes, that in her flight towards freedom Sojourner "refused to stop until she saw hope" (p. 9). Then on the following page she writes that Sojourner "ran right up to hope's front door" (p. 10). The hope that Sojourner finds is in the White resisters who opened their front door for her.

As White resisters, the characters Issac and Maria Van Wagener, an abolitionist Quaker couple who believe in freedom for all people, provide Sojourner with a significant amount of assistance. First, they offer Sojourner shelter by inviting her into their home. Then, when "John Dumont catches up with her, [they] offer to buy her

services” (p. 10) so that he cannot not drag her back into slavery. Amazingly, Sojourner’s master accepts the offer. He takes the money that Isaac Van Wagener off them and then leaves. After this, right after John Dumont has left, the Wagener’s free Sojourner. While readers are not presented with many details about who the Wageners are as people, they are clearly positioned in the story as White resisters who assist Sojourner with her journey from slavery to legal freedom.

Sojourner sets out on her own to find work after gaining her legal freedom. In time she becomes a housekeeper and begins to assist those who still lived in slavery. In the story, Pinkney writes that she did this because to her “freedom [also] meant helping others” (p. 15). Throughout the remainder of the story Sojourner is positioned as a resister who works to bring an end to slavery through the power of words. She “travels up and down in the land to share her ideas” (p. 19) and seeks out “folks who could help spread the word about freedom [by] speaking out against slavery” (p. 22).

The representation of Sojourner speaking out against slavery, seeking others who might assist in this act, and her involvement and powerful speech at a women’s rights convention, which closes out the book, positions her as a person who was aware of her power and took action against an institution that dominated through dehumanization, victimization, and violence. In essence, throughout the progression of the story, Sojourner is represented as a multidimensional character, who moves across the power continuum. In the text she is represented as a victim and resister who is sought to strike a blow against the dominant institution of slavery through actions and words.

### **The Master, John Dumont.**

John Dumont only appears briefly at the beginning of the book. Although he only

has a small role in the narrative, it is a significant one. In the story, Dumont is positioned in a dominant position. His domination is illustrated clearly as he knowingly dehumanizes, manipulates, and victimizes Sojourner. She is his property and he can do with her as he pleases. As a White man living during the antebellum period, he exercises power over his circumstances and uses the power he is afforded under a system where Whites could own Blacks for their own benefit. Dumont buys Sojourner so that she can help with the upkeep of his plantation. At the beginning of the story readers are presented with details about how “worked all day [for him]” because she is his slave (p. 7).

Other specific acts of Dumont’s dominance are represented by the way that he manipulates young Sojourner. Early in the text Dumont, “promises to free her if she worked hard for him” (p. 8). After this promise, readers are presented with images on two pages that show Sojourner working hard with the hope that she will be free. However, then readers learn of Dumont’s disingenuous ways a page later when Sojourner request her freedom after “she [has] worked hard for many years” (p. 8) and is rebuffed by Dumont who “does not honor his promise” (p. 9). In essence, John Dumont represents the system of slavery that organized society across racial lines and the White slave owners who worked and controlled Black slaves for their own benefit.

#### **Isaac and Maria Van Wagener.**

The Quaker couple, abolitionist Isaac and Maria Van Wagner, who appear on two pages in the text, are positioned in the role of conscious resisters, who try to help Blacks escape slavery. Like John Dumont they briefly appear in the text but their role is also significant. They represent or symbolize the group of White abolitionists who lived during antebellum times who viewed slavery as a wrongdoing and worked to help those

who suffered under it. In *Sojourner Truth's Step-Stomp Stride* because Isaac and Maria “believe in freedom for all people” (p. 11) they resist and take action by helping Sojourner to gain her legal freedom. When Sojourner is on the run from Master Dumont and arrives at their farm’s front door, “they offer [her] shelter” (p. 11).

Shortly after her arrival, John Dumont catches up to Sojourner and informs the Isaac and Maria that she has run away from his plantation. However, Isaac offers to buy Sojourner for a significant amount of money so that she will not be taken back to his plantation. Enticed by the money and the opportunity to rid himself of a rebellious slave Dumont accepts the offer and returns home. Immediately after this micro-interaction, Isaac frees her so “she doesn’t have to run anymore [and] sets out on her own” (p.11). In essence, the couple’s conscious resistance against the institution of slavery ends with them telling Dumont that they are buying Sojourner to work for them, an act of collusion in an effort to free her. In this narrative, it is through their assistance that Sojourner gains her legal freedom.

### **Olive Gilbert.**

Olive Gilbert is another White character who briefly appears in the text and is positioned as a conscious resister. In the book, she is represented as an ally who works with Sojourner to use to power of words to present details about the horrors an oppression of slavery. In the text, Olive is introduced as an abolitionist friend who Sojourner meets in her travels. She reads the bible to Sojourner to help her memorize many passages from the text. This act gives Sojourner access to the Bible, a text that provides her with sayings to weave into her powerful speeches against slavery.

Olive also works with Sojourner to record details about her past. She listens as

Sojourner “tells her about her childhood as a slave” (p.20) and then writes it down to create a text about Sojourner that is published in 1850. The text that Olive helps to produce is titled *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth: A North Slave*. In incorporating this character and event, the Pinkneys are presenting a narrative that details the collaboration between White abolitionists and former Black slaves in producing slave narratives during antebellum times. The representation of the act shows the role of the written word in challenging the institution of slavery.

### **A Critical Examination of Gender, Race, and Class**

The ending of *Sojourner Truth's Step-Stomp Stride* is closed to interpretation as it clearly shows that Sojourner lives in freedom and is committed to spending a life using her words to bring an end to slavery and to help women gain more rights in the United States. After representing Sojourner giving a speech about the need to end slavery and give “women the same rights as men” (p. 25) at the 1851 women’s rights convention in Ohio, the last page of the book shows Sojourner leaving the stage, heading off into the world. The illustration that closes the text also contributes to this closed interpretation. In the full-bleed illustration, a determined-looking Sojourner has her book in hand. She is looking out onto a vast field and walking out the door of the women’s rights convention (see Figure 2). It is another representation that shows that Sojourner is heading off into the world to spread her message of social justice. The bright yellow color of the illustration and Sojourner’s stance in the doorframe seems to signal that she is energized to carry out the important work.



Figure 2. Illustration by Brian Pinkney from *Sojourner Truth's Step-Stomp Stride*.

This illustration directly follows the words “Black. Beautiful. True. That was Sojourner” (p. 31). By ending the story in this way, the image above combined with these words, the Pinkneys represent Sojourner’s fate in the future as clear and certain. She will continue to share her truth about her experiences as a woman and a slave to the world. Overall, Sojourner is positioned as a victim who is resisting with words the domination that is based on race and gender. However, in this narrative about slavery, Sojourner does not stand alone in her fight against oppression. In *Step-Stomp Stride*, the other female characters also work against domination that is based on race. As resisters, the White female characters, Maria and Olive, work with Sojourner to help her escape slavery and then to create her counter-narrative about the institution.

In Maria’s case, she supports her husband in a decision to buy and then legally free Sojourner so that she can set out on her own. However, in this micro-interaction Davis Pinkney subtly represents how gender shaped a person’s social position during the antebellum period. In the scene with the Wageners, it is Isaac who overtly acts. Although Maria supports her husband, Davis Pinkney does not write that they jointly make the decisions regarding Sojourner. When Dumont catches up with Sojourner in their home, it is Isaac not Maria who offers to buy her services from him. It is Isaac who pays the

money to Dumont and he frees her. Although both Isaac and Maria both believed in freedom, it is Isaac who takes the leading role in assisting Sojourner in gaining her legal freedom. Maria is positioned as a support to her husband and Sojourner.

The other White female character featured in *Sojourner's Step-Stomp Stride* is also in a supportive role. She supports Sojourner in her resistance against slavery. As noted earlier, shortly after Sojourner attains her legal freedom in the story it is Olive Gilbert who documents what Sojourner experienced as a slave so that her story can be shared to the world through the written word. Because Sojourner could not read or write, it is Olive, who was an abolitionist, who listens to Sojourner as she recounts details about her childhood as a slave so it could become a book which is published.

In working with Sojourner to create this book, Olive is represented as the character who helps to spread the word about the evils of slavery. This micro-interaction represents the collaboration that took place between a White female abolitionist and former Black female slaves. Olive and Sojourner's micro-interaction represents the *sisterhood* that existed between escaped female slaves like Sojourner Truth and White female abolitionists. Brian Pinkney also visually represents this *sisterhood*, or the close relationship that existed between the two groups. In a double-paged illustration that portrays the micro-interaction that takes place between Olive and Sojourner, Pinkney creates an image that captures the close-knit nature of their relationship (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. Illustration by Brian Pinkney from *Sojourner Truth's Step-Stomp Stride*.

The image certainly does not reflect the separate lives that most Black and Whites lived during the antebellum period. In the painting, both women sit face to face at a large table in front of a fire place, Olive has a smile on her face and Sojourner's hands are comfortable clasped as they engage in their collaborative work. The yellowish color also contributes to creating the sense a sense of warmth between the women. For young readers the image serves as a testament that some Blacks and Whites came together willingly in the past to work on social justice issues.

In essence, in *Sojourner's Step-Stomp Stride* Olive represents the White female abolitionists who played a significant role in the struggle against slavery and discrimination. She represents White female abolitionists who circulated petitions, wrote letters and poems, and published articles in the leading antislavery periodicals, and as illustrated in *Sojourner's Step-Stomp Stride*, worked with former female Black slaves to present books that documented the horrors of slavery. Olive also represents how class worked with race in the abolitionist movement. Olive uses her race and class position to be a strong ally to Sojourner. As a White woman of means, she lives in a home that affords her the privacy and space to work with Sojourner. Because she can read and write (which was one of the class markers for those in the upper class) she can "write down Sojourner's story" (p. 21).



These women work against structural domination based on race, a power structure enacted by one dominant White male character in the text, Master Dumont. However, it is important to note that there is a White male character, Isaac Van Wagner, who also resists the oppressive system of slavery. Although the White male characters are not positioned monolithically, they both illustrate the power that was afforded to White men from the middle or upper classes under the slave system. Because of their race and class Dumont and Isaac have the power to purchase Sojourner to work for them or set her free. Essentially, the text shows that because of their race, class, and gender some White men had power to enact the slave system.

It is this domination that Sojourner is fighting throughout the text. She is represented as someone fighting to end domination based that is based on race and gender. Overall, the representation of a Black woman, who struggles to improve the social condition for Blacks and women in United States during the antebellum period, is the primary message regarding gender that foregrounded in *Sojourner's Step-Stomp and Stride*. Sojourner is at the center of the story as an agent of change fighting against a system of oppression that is maintained by a White man in the story. In representing a Black woman who works towards equality for both Blacks and women in the United States, this text can certainly be read as a Black feminist narrative.

*Sojourner Truth's Step-Stomp Stride* is a good example of what critical Black feminists have argued that some Black writers have done in their representation of slavery. It considers the oppression that women faced during the antebellum period. By incorporating Sojourner's speech at the women's right convention in Akron, Ohio, in 1851, the Pinkneys are taking up the unique position that all women faced under during

the 1800s. In *Sojourner Truth's Step-Stomp Stride*, they have crafted a narrative that not only looks at race, but also considers gender and class positions. Sojourner as an activist who recognized that nature of oppression of Black woman was different from that of the Black man. Sojourner makes it clear that it was “stupidity of men” (p. 25) who believed that, “men had to open door for [women], help them in carriages, and over puddles” (p. 23) that played a role in the oppression that all women faced.

Moreover, in including an adaptation of the Sojourner’s “Ain’t I A Woman” speech while she is at the 1851 Women’s Rights convention, the Pinkneys take up the unique position of Black women who lived under slavery. In the adaptation of the speech which appears in the text, Sojourner shares that “she is never helped into carriages . . . has plowed . . . planted . . . gathered in barns . . . and no man could beat [her]” (p. 27) and yet she was indeed a woman. By including this speech the Andrea and Brian Pinkney heed the call that made by Black critical feminists, that is, to represent the unique position Black women have experienced throughout history.

*Sojourner Truth's Step-Stomp Stride* also foregrounds how women worked together across racial lines to fight against oppression that was based on race and gender. For instance, in the text Olive uses her position as a White woman to help Sojourner write a narrative about her life. Because of her race and class (middle or gentry) it is possible for Olive to successfully help Sojourner with the publication of her book. By including Olive as a character in the story, the Pinkneys use Olive to illustrate that some White women used the privilege afforded to them because of their race and class to become allies in the fight against slavery. Unlike Sojourner, because of her race it was legal for Olive to learn to read and write. Furthermore, one might assume that because of her class she had to

time to take advantage of this right and unlike many other individuals during the antebellum time she was literate. It is partially because Olive is literate that Sojourner's story is written down and published. Another clear example of women working across racial and class lines is illustrated through Sojourner's attendance at the Women's Rights Conventions. At this convention there are illustrations that show White women in attendance who are sitting in the crowd as Sojourner gives a speech about the need for gender and race equality in the United States.

In *Sojourner Truth's Step-Stomp Stride* the Pinkneys represent how women worked together in combined struggle for civil rights and illustrate how the movement to abolish slavery was closely related to the early women's rights movement. They also represent that during the antebellum period women were gaining political organizing skills that in many ways proved successful in the battle to bring an end to slavery and for women's suffrage.

*Sojourner Truth's Step-Stomp Stride* also presents particular perspectives about race. The text ends with an image of Sojourner staring out into the world with her slave narrative in hand and the final words "Big. Black. Beautiful. True. That was Sojourner" (p. 31). These words and image that are used to underscore this picture book are significant as they speak to the agency of Black slaves. Andrea Davis Pinkney draws on another literary device that is used to validate the antebellum slave narrative. In ending this text by describing Sojourner as Truth, the Pinkneys are representing the Black voice or words as a place where the truth about slavery can be found. The ending of the text represents the perspective that there was the presence of Black agency during slavery times.

This text also weaves representations of Whites living during slavery times into the narrative. In the book, as noted above, there are Whites who dominate and support slavery and others who resist and take action against the institution. The text rejects the perspective that all Whites had the same view of or relationship with slavery. The presence of a dominant White slave owner and colluding White abolitionists in the text shows Whites as exercising power in different ways. By representing these complex power relations, the Pinkneys complicate Whites-Black relationships across a continuum.

Beyond complicating power relations, as a slave biography *Sojourner Truth's Step-Stomp Stride* “continues the objective of recovering Black heroes as a way to expand the often limited focus of children’s education beyond the histories of White Americans” (Connolly, 2013, p. 196). The text can be read as a counter-narrative that foregrounds Black slave perspective and challenges many of the assertions that were made by White historians in the early historiography of the institution.

Sojourner’s experiences propel the narrative. It is primarily through the representation of her life that readers learn about slavery. By placing Sojourner at the center of the story, the text follows in the tradition of the neo-slave narrative. Here, as KaaVonnia Hinton (2008) has noted, we have a neo-slave narrative that seeks to make the voices of Black slaves audible and represent their resistance to slavery. Furthermore, *Sojourner's Truth's Step-Stomp Stride* presents a story that also joins a continually growing body of neo-slave narratives that rejects proslavery stereotypes. In the text, Sojourner is not represented as a comical, stupid, tragic, or ugly. In sharp contrast, the Pinkneys depict her as determined, smart, and someone who accomplishes a number of goals. Davis Pinkney writes that Sojourner is Black and beautiful a number of times

throughout the text, and the Brian Pinkney's illustrations of Sojourner, where she is often surrounded by a golden glow, help to consistently convey her charisma and conviction. The representation of Sojourner's actions on the Dumont plantation also allows the text to be placed alongside the ever-growing collection of contemporary historical accounts that challenge the claim that Black slaves were content and compliant. In this story, Sojourner protests and resists her plight in slavery with her flight and words towards freedom.

The text also challenges the claim that White slave owners were kind and supportive. As noted earlier, Sojourner's White owner is not represented as kind and supportive of her. Rather, he manipulates a young Sojourner by promising her freedom if she works extra hard and then does not honor his promise. It is through Sojourner's owner that the readers are presented with the "ugly way of slavery" (p. 7). This illustration of the harsh nature of slavery is also presented by way of Sojourner's speech in the text recounts how much work she did and the maltreatment she experienced under slavery.

### **Production Practices of *Moses: When Harriet Led Her People to Freedom***

*Moses: When Harriet Led Her People to Freedom*, which is written by African American writer and professor Carole Boston Weatherford and illustrated by the renowned African American artist Kadir Nelson, is another representation of slavery through biography. Like *Sojourner Truth's Step-Stomp Stride*, the text was published by the Hyperion's Books for Children Jump at the Sun division. *Moses: When Harriet Led Her People to Freedom* has also won a significant number of awards, honors, and prizes. It is the winner of the 2007 Coretta Scott King Award, the National Association for the

Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Outstanding Work for Children Award, the Storytelling World Resource Award, the Randolph Caldecott Medal, Southern Indie Booksellers Book Award, and the Children's Literature Council of Southern California Award.

It has also been recognized as a best book by the American Book Sellers Association, *Booklist*, *The Horn Book*, *Kirkus*, and the International Reading Association, and has been touted as a useful addition to the classroom by notable organizations such as the National Council for Social Studies and Bank Street College of Education. Moreover, it has been recognized as one of the top texts that can be used to teach young people about the institution of slavery and the life of Harriet Tubman (Rochman, 2006). For instance, Karina Bender (2007) notes that it deserves a place on classroom shelves because it is an excellent fictional account of Harriet Tubman's life, and Marilyn Courtot (2007) maintains that because it is a stunning mix of text and illustration the book is one that many young readers will find appealing and informative. The text is constructed as a 48-page picture book that consists of words and illustrations on each page. The book has been classified as a text for early grades (Kindergarten-4th grade).

Similar to *Sojourner Truth's Step-Stomp Stride*, *Moses: When Harriet Led Her People to Freedom* is a text that was also created because, like the Pinkneys, Weatherford and Nelson have also made it clear through comments and their body of work that they too are committed to providing images of strong Black people in their children books. Weatherford has written over 36 books that feature the cultural heritage, history, and the achievements of African Americans. She has written picture-book biographies about John Coltrane, Matthew Henson, Jessie Owens, Billie Holiday, President Barack Obama, First

Lady Michelle Obama, Julius Rosenwald, and Oprah Winfrey. She has also written a number of children's books that feature Black characters that focus on the Civil Rights Movement, jazz, slavery, and sports.

Similar to Andrea Davis Pickney, Weatherford notes that she is committed to writing Blacks into the world of children's literature. She states that when she was growing up in Baltimore there was not much multicultural literature for young readers. Although she was an avid reader, she only read two books that included girls who looked like her. Because of this underrepresentation she felt like there was a void in her life. Weatherford has shared that because of this experience she committed herself to creating children's texts that feature African American characters and historical figures. As an author and teacher, Weatherford believes that her mission is to mine the past for family stories, fading African American traditions and forgotten struggles so kids won't carry prejudices forward into their future.

Like Weatherford, critically acclaimed artist and illustrator Kadir Nelson has helped to create many picture books that feature Black characters. He has helped to create picture book biographies about Henry "Box" Brown, Duke Ellington, Joe Louis, Michael Jordan Nelson Mandela, Jackie Robinson, Coretta Scott, Wangari Mother and illustrated one text that presents speeches from Barack Obama and Martin Luther King Jr. He has also created a number of texts that represent the great migration, Civil Rights Movement, Negro League baseball, the slave trade, the Underground Railroad, and other aspects of African American culture and history. Nelson has won numerous awards for his work in children's books. Kadir's titles have been named The New York Times Best Illustrated Books of the year and have won many awards and honors. He has won the Caldecott,

Coretta Scott King, and Jane Addams children's book awards. He has been honored with NAACP Image and Carter G. Woodson awards for his positive contribution to the Black image in the United States. He has also received a Roger F. Sibert International Book Medal., which is awarded annually to the author(s) and illustrator(s) of the most distinguished informational book published in the United States in English during the preceding year.

Similar to Weatherford, Nelson has continuously stated his commitment to creating children's books that feature Black characters. In his 2012 Coretta Scott King Book Award acceptance speech for *Heart and Soul: The Story of America and African Americans*, Nelson notes that "The African American story was one that most resonated with me and became my primary focus" (Nelson, 2012, p. 69). Nelson went on to say that for most Americans, African American history, "has often sat in the shadows [and] left to be discovered only by those whose curiosity would lead them to search deeper, beyond the generic survey of history we are generally fed in our classrooms" (Nelson, 2012, p. 69). For Nelson, his work seeks to address "the sidebar treatment" that African American history has received in the past by making sure that his texts go beyond the generic survey of history that is generally presented in classrooms. Nelson also believes that his books work to counter inaccurate and inadequate representations of Blacks.

### **Summary of *Moses: When Harriet Led Her People to Freedom***

*Moses: When Harriet Led Her People to Freedom* is a fictionalized account of Harriet Tubman's physical and spiritual escape from slavery to freedom. The narrative is represented as a poetic conversation between Harriet Tubman and God. The book begins with Harriet's life as an adult slave on a plantation in Maryland and focuses on her



burning desire to seek freedom in the North. Readers are presented with a story that features the role that Harriet's faith played in her successful journey into freedom. The majority of the text centers on Harriet's perilous journey towards freedom and concludes as she returns to the South to rescue members of her family and other slaves, buoyed by her strong faith in God. The book includes a foreword and detailed author's note that further contextualizes Harriet Tubman's life. Because Harriet's spirituality is a central part of the story the text has been recognized as a story of Tubman's life as a saint (Connolly, 2013). Throughout the book, Weatherford incorporates Tubman's spirituality to frame her escape as a conversation between Harriet (whose petitions and reflections are shown in italicized sentences) and God (whose declarative promises are in uppercase font). Carole Weatherford Boston presents the story of Tubman as a saint. She incorporates Tubman's spirituality to frame escape as a conversation between Harriet and God.

### **Exercise of Power Among Characters**

*Moses: When Harriet Led Her People to Freedom* is told from a mixture of the third-person and first-person points of view. In this text the narrator reveals what the characters, Harriet Tubman, the woman in the wagon, the farmer and his wife, patrollers, and other slaves seeking freedom think, feel, do, observe, and say. Like *Sojourner Truth's Step-Stomp Stride*, as a fictionalized biography, one human character is foregrounded in the representation of slavery.

Additionally, similar to *Sojourner Truth's Step-Stomp Stride*, although readers gain minor insights about the consciousness of the minor supporting human characters, it is Harriet's words, thoughts, feelings, and observations that are primarily featured

throughout the story. However, unlike *Sojourner's Truth Step-Stomp and Stride*, the words of another non-human character, the omnipresent God, are also featured prominently throughout the book.

### **God.**

Throughout *Moses: When Harriet Led Her People to Freedom* God remains in the position of a conscious resister who provides Harriet Tubman with support and guidance in her fight against slavery. At the beginning of the text, God, who is dominant over nature, shares with Harriet that, "I [have] set the North Star in the heavens [as a] means for you to be free" (p. 1). After this, as Harriet prepares to take her flight towards freedom, she states, "Lord, I'm going to hold steady on you" (p. 2). To this statement God replies, "I am going to see you through Child" (p. 2). Then, on the night of her escape, God again supports Harriet by way of his/her control nature when he/she causes an owl to screech which provides her with "a sign" [that the] hour has come" (p. 3) to attempt make her way towards freedom.

The instances of God's support for Harriet's acts of agency against slavery continue throughout the remainder of the text. For example, as she struggles through the swamp while in flight she calls on God and says she cannot make it alone. Hearing Harriet's plea, God responds and encourages her by letting her know that there are "mortals who will give you guidance and refuge" (p. 7). In the story, after these words are spoken "a woman in a wagon appears and speaks kindly to [Harriet]" (p. 7). Then she points her "to safe havens [which are] hiding places for runaways. Harriet then "steals away into the darkness" (p. 7) after receiving this guidance from God. Next, God tells Harriet to "search to search for his face in strangers" (p. 14) to determine who is friend or foe in her

journey towards freedom. Following this, Harriet comes upon a White farmer and his wife who commit to helping her on her journey towards freedom by providing her with food.

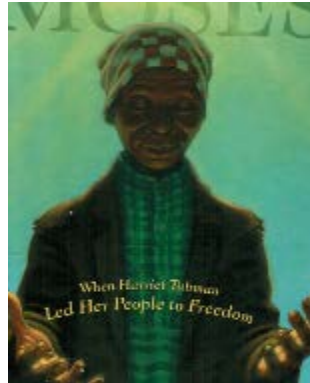
After she is provided with food from the farmer and his wife, God continues to encourage Harriet in her escape towards freedom by telling her that he/she will arm her with courage against her enemies who would attempt to cast her back into slavery. He/She states that she should “trust me to protect you” (p. 17) and that she should “use my lessons to [remain] free” (p. 19). He/She also says to “wade in the water to trick the [slave hunter’s] dogs” (p. 22) and to “keep going” (p. 23) despite setbacks. In this story, Weatherford presents God’s words and guidance as the spiritual support that Harriet depends upon and uses to make her way into freedom.

After supporting her successful escape into freedom, God continues to resist with Harriet in her efforts to strike blows against the institution of slavery by way of the Underground Railroad. He/She aids her in this task by telling her to “be a Moses to your people” (p. 36) and reminds her that she has been blessed with “a strong body and clever mind [which can be] used to break the chains [of slavery]” (p. 36). He also encourages her to try to help as many Blacks she can with her work on the Underground Railroad. In essence, throughout the text, as a conscious resister, God continuously supports Harriet in her struggle.

### **Harriet.**

Weatherford and Nelson open their biography in a similar fashion to the Pinkneys. They begin the story with full-bleed illustrations of Harriet that appears on the cover (see Figure 4) and that comes after the forward on the second page of the text (see Figure 5).

Like the Pinkneys, by beginning the text with a large picture of only Harriet Weatherford and Nelson draw on the framing technique used in antebellum slave narrative. By featuring Harriet's image at the beginning of the text and using her words to begin the narrative conveys to readers that it is the Black slave's experience that will be foregrounded in the story.



*Figure 4. Illustration by Kadir Nelson from Moses: When Harriet Led Her People to Freedom.*



*Figure 5. Illustration by Kadir Nelson from Moses: When Harriet Led Her People to Freedom.*

Furthermore, the full-page portraits of a contemplative Tubman at the beginning of the text seem to signal that what will follow in the text is an introspective and reflective narrative about her life during the antebellum period. The blue background color in both paintings and the sunlight halo over portrait also provide readers with a sense that Harriet

is a composed and confident character who is ready to calmly communicate the truth about slavery.

Similar to the Pinkneys, Weatherford and Nelson begin the story with the main character of the text (Harriet Tubman) positioned in the role of a victim. In the opening illustration Harriet is sitting submissively in a field staring up at the sky towards God. As she stares, she shares details about her circumstances as a victim living in slavery. She states, “Master owns me, drives me like a mule. Now he means to sell me south in chains to work cotton, rice, indigo, or sugarcane. Never to see my family again” (p. 2).

However, after a few pages that detail the hard work that Harriet did on her master’s plantation, Harriet is quickly moved into a position of active resistance, which she maintains throughout the remainder of the book. The representation of Harriet’s resistance begins with her decision to attempt a flight towards freedom. At this point in the story Harriet is described as someone whose intelligence, determination, courage, and commitment to God will help her to successfully find her way to freedom despite the obstacles that she will certainly face along the way. She is smart enough “not to tell a soul her plans [about escape]” (p. 3) and her determination and courage are detailed as she “runs through a swamp” (p. 7) and continues to flee even though her “feet bleed and her gut churns” (p. 17).

Harriet’s courage and determination are also represented in the illustrations throughout the first part of the text. For instance, in one illustration, after she has successfully made her way through a swamp and finds her way to a farm, Nelson paints her standing in a clearing considering her next step. In this picture, Harriet, who is centered on the page, stands with a stern and seemingly stoic countenance and a raised

fist, which seems to symbolize her courage and determination.

In another illustration that follows, Nelson represents Harriet with the same countenance. However, this time she is staring at the sky and seeking God's guidance because, "she would rather die than stay a slave" (p. 17). In another illustration, she is again illustrated with a stern facial expression as she crouches in a potato hole for days so that patroller who nabs runaways will not catch a sight of her. In this image, it seems like Nelson is trying to create an image of her not as a cowering slave but as a confident one who is determined to be free. Then in another illustration that accompanies details about Harriet's stop at a church that is another station of the Underground Railroad, Nelson represents Tubman's determination in a striking close up of her face so dramatically that it spills onto a second page (see Figure 6). Taken together, Nelson's illustrations seem to "exalt a heroic portraiture of Harriet" (Connolly, 2013, p. 198). In the representation of Harriet's escape to freedom, her determination and courage are conveyed through words and images.



*Figure 6. Illustration by Kadir Nelson from Moses: When Harriet Led Her People to Freedom.*

After Harriet finds freedom in the story, she is positioned primarily in a role of a resister. Throughout the remainder of the text Harriet attempts to help other slaves escape slavery as a conductor on the Underground Railroad. In this role she is challenging the institution of slavery by helping slaves to escape and survive in freedom. At this point in the story Harriet is a conscious resister against the institution of slavery, a position that is

explicitly represented by way of the narrator's word. The unnamed narrator states "Harriet helped move slaves along the Underground Railroad [and] handed out shirt and shoes [and] served [them] with butter beans and biscuits" (p. 35). Furthermore, because she finds success in her role as a resister in the story she is described as "a Moses to her people" (p. 36) and recognized as a strong, determined, and intelligent woman who found success in resisting slavery.

This written representation of Harriet as a conscious resister who successfully challenged slavery is also strongly supported by the illustrations in the last part of the text. For instance, in the second to last illustration of the text, Harriet is pictured prominently, hunched before a group of runaway slaves with her hands upon her lips signaling to them to be quiet as she leads them through the woods toward freedom. Harriet's face and posture render her as a character who is a determined and strong leader successfully helping victims to escape from slavery. The image captures the message rendered through the title. As Marilyn Courtot (2006) the ending of the book makes it clear that she has become a Moses to her people.

In the last illustration of the book, again Nelson paints Harriet with a stern expression on her face. In this full-page illustration, Harriet stands with a staff in hand above text that reads "Well done, Moses, Well done" (p. 41). Using this image and line to close the text Weatherford and Nelson have positioned Harriet as a resister who has found success in challenging slavery by first escaping and then helping others to do the same. Her successful use of nonviolent resistance against slavery is the message that Weatherford and Nelson showcase in their closing of the story. Similar to Sojourner in *Sojourner Truth's Step-Stomp Stride*, Harriet is represented as a multi-dimensional

character who exercises power across a continuum. She is depicted as a victim, resister, and as a character with agency who worked to help Blacks escape slavery. It is a depiction befitting of a woman who is being represented in the text as a Moses to her people.

### **Harriet's Master.**

Although he is positioned as a dominant figure, Harriet's master is silenced in this text. Readers are not privy to his thoughts, feelings, or observations, and he is not visually represented in the text. What readers know about Harriet's master is through the words about him. Harriet describes his dominance by stating that he owns her, drives her like a mule, and plans to sell her south to work so that she will never see her family again. In other words, he can control her social condition. Similar to Master Dumont in *Sojourner Truth's Step-Stomp Stride*, he represents a system of slavery, which includes slave owners who organize society across racial lines.

### **The White Woman in the Wagon.**

The White woman in the wagon appears briefly in the text. She is incorporated into the narrative as a conscious resister who works to help Harriet find her freedom. During Harriet's flight towards freedom, she treats her well and takes her to hiding places for runaways. While she is represented with a small dark silhouette in one illustration, readers are not provided with many details about who Sojourner is or what she thinks. What readers know about her is presented by Harriet who notes that she is kind and shares how she is helpful in pointing her towards those safe havens that will help her find her way to freedom. She is similar to the White resisters in *Sojourner Truth's Step-Stomp Stride* as she represents White allies such as abolitionists who sought to challenge the



system of slavery by assisting Black slaves who were attempting to escape the oppressive institution through flight.

### **The White Farmer and His Wife.**

A White farmer and his wife also appear briefly in *Moses: When Harriet Led Her People to Freedom*. Similar to the White woman in the wagon these farmers are also represented as resisters and what readers come to know about them is shared by Harriet. Throughout their appearance in the story they are silent but Harriet conveys that they feed her and send her on her way on her journey towards freedom in wagon that is covered by blankets and driven by a White woman (described in the previous section). In essence, the White farmer and his wife are written into the narrative as members of the Underground Railroad. They are conscious resisters working to help Blacks strike a blow against slavery through the act of escape.

### **A Critical Examination of Gender, Race, and Class**

The closed ending of *Moses: When Harriet Led Her People to Freedom* makes it clear that she has done her job as agent of change working to help people escape slavery. Nelson and Weatherford use the words “Well Done, Moses, Well Done” (p. 41) and the final illustration, where Harriet is triumphantly standing and haloed in sunlight to signal the warmth and happiness she feels about successfully helping a number of blacks escape slavery (see Figure 7). The end page makes it clear that Harriet is positioned as a woman who finds some success in exercising power over circumstances and is at the center of a narrative about slavery.



Figure 7. Illustration by Kadir Nelson from *Moses: When Harriet Led Her People to Freedom*.

Nonetheless, while Sojourner is at the center of this text, it does not take up many of the issues that were unique to women during slavery times. There are no issues raised about pregnancy, sexual harassment, sexism, miscegenation, or gender-specific work. However, the text goes to great length to represent Harriet as an activist figure and as determined, intelligent and courageous Black woman who resisted the domination of slavery. Harriet shows that, indeed, there were smart and sophisticated Black women who battled oppression in their move from slavery to freedom. She demonstrates great courage as a conductor on the Underground Railroad. Like Sojourner, in *Sojourner Truth's Step-Stomp Stride*, Weatherford's Tubman models bravery, independence, and success. However, unlike the Pinkney's Sojourner, she is primarily concerned with overcoming and fighting racial oppression rather than gender oppression.

This biography positions a Black woman at the center of a narrative about slavery. Initially she is positioned as a victim. However, similar to Sojourner Truth in *Sojourner's Step-Stomp Stride*, Harriet finds her way out of slavery, and then becomes an agent of change who attempts to help others resist slavery by way of the Underground Railroad. Because there is a woman who is at the center of this story and there are women resisting domination that is based on race and working towards social change, some may argue

that it too can be read as a feminist text.

In *Moses: When Harriet Led Her People to Freedom* there are also White women who are concerned with battling racial oppression. These women are positioned as resisters who are working to help Blacks escape slavery. The White woman in wagon and the farmer's spouse are allies who help Harriet find her way to freedom. Consequently, all the female characters are working against the institution of slavery. It is also important to note that again the women are pitted in the narrative as working against a White man, Harriet's master, who is positioned as the only dominant character in the text. However, similar to *Sojourner's Step-Stomp Stride* there is also a White man, the farmer who is rendered in the same way as the White women. He too is a resister.

*Moses: When Harriet Led Her People to Freedom* also presents particular perspectives about race. The text concludes with a heroic portrait of Harriet Tubman that is placed above the words "Well done, Moses, Well Done" (p. 41). By ending their biography in this manner Weatherford and Nelson represent Harriet as a symbol of Black success during an oppressive time in the history of African Americans. The portrait of Tubman is similar to all the depictions strewn throughout the picture book. Nelson's art represents Tubman as intelligent, determined, courageous, and heroic. Even when she is positioned as a victim in slavery, the illustrations do not portray her as downtrodden, starving, or poor. She does not wear tattered clothing and there are no tears in her eyes.

Nelson paints a number of images of Harriet using harsh lines and deep color throughout the book. In these portraits of Harriet she is dressed well and maintains a stern and care-wracked facial expression. These illustrations of Harriet, which are set in the rural inky darkness of night, render his protagonist as a vibrant larger than life presence.

In Nelson's powerful compositions of Harriet the harsh lines of her face combined with dramatic postures render her character as a complex one: introspective, dignified, determined, stoic, and strong (see Figures 8 and 9).



*Figure 8.* Illustration by Kadir Nelson from *Moses: When Harriet Led Her People to Freedom*.



*Figure 9.* Illustration by Kadir Nelson from *Moses: When Harriet Led Her People to Freedom*.

At the same time, Weatherford counters proslavery stereotypes by writing a narrative that illustrates Harriet's strength, dignity, and spirituality. She is not presented as a tragic figure who is content with her plight in slavery. Instead she is a determined and powerful figure who is committed to resisting the institution of slavery.

By presenting Harriet as a dignified and powerful figure who successfully finds her own freedom and helps other to attain theirs as well, Weatherford and Nelson have constructed a text that challenges many of the proslavery stereotypes of the Black slaves.

It can be read as a counter-narrative to earlier racist representations of Black slaves. There are no contented slaves here, no Black slaves who are childlike or stupid. On a whole, the pictorial content and words in *Moses: When Harriet Led Her People To Freedom* plays a significant role in representing Harriet in a manner that strongly counters proslavery stereotypes from the past. Similar to *Sojourner Truth's Step-Stomp Stride*, this biography illustrates that Blacks attempted to challenge slavery through agency. Furthermore, in countering racist stereotypes about slaves, Weatherford and Nelson have constructed a Black woman in their text that can be used to encourage racial pride or to celebrate Black heritage (Connolly, 2013; Sims Bishop, 2005).

Lastly, like *Sojourner Truth's Step-Stomp Stride* *Moses: When Harriet Led Her People to Freedom* also represents that Whites living during slavery times were not monolithic in their stances about slavery. In this narrative, there is an oppressive White slave owner and White resisters who help Harriet escape from slavery. In the story, like *Sojourner Truth's Step-Stomp Stride*, the representation of the White slave owner also challenges the assertion that White slave owner were kind and supportive. Harriet's master is represented as a mean owner who drives her like a mule, and plans to sell her south to work so that she will never see her family again.

### **Production Practices of *Freedom's a-Callin me***

Created by the notable author-illustrator team (award-winning poet Ntozanke Shange and renowned illustrator Rod Brown) that produced *We Troubled the Waters* (2009), *Freedom's a-Callin me* is another picture book that vividly represents the institution of slavery. Shange and Brown have made good on their stated commitment to represent the African American experience in children's literature. Shange has written

children's books that feature African American historical figures such as Coretta Scott King, Mohammad Ali, and Duke Ellington and Brown has worked with the renowned writer Julius Lester to create another picture books about slavery titled *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road* (1999).

Shange and Brown's *Freedom's a-Callin me* (2012) has been recognized as a "Best Book" in the world of children's literature by *Publishers Weekly*, *Kirkus*, and the Cooperative Children's Book Center for its haunting free verse poems and distinctive paintings that chronicle life under slavery from the point of view of various enslaved men and women. Hope Morrison (2012) has written that *Freedom's a-Callin me* can serve as a wonderful companion piece to more prosaically factual works about the Underground Railroad. The book is made up of 32 pages in traditional picture-book format. Throughout the book there are fifteen poems that are each illustrated with accompanying images. Most reviewers classify it as an upper elementary and middle school text.

In *Freedom's a-Callin me*, Ntozake Shange, who is the writer of the award-winning play *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide* (1975), pushes the boundaries of the representation of slavery in children's picture books by presenting a story about slavery through a collection of fifteen poems. One slave is the poetic voice for those who toil on a cotton plantation and look to the North Star for direction to the Underground Railroad to freedom. The poems are compact and powerful, with single words carrying as much weight as lengthy phrases; though they are free verse, there is a musicality to the rhythm and its portrayal of a breathless, anguished voice that, as a number of reviewers recommend, begs to be read aloud (Morrison, 2012; Courtot, 2012). Shange's common use of African-American idioms and dialect in her fictional works is also present in the

collection of poems, which according to Marilyn Courtot (2012), contribute greatly to their compelling qualities that can transport readers into the past. To Courtot, the poetic form and the use of what could be considered the language of the slaves makes the text persuasive.

Reviewers such as Hope Morrison (2012) and Hazel Rochman (2012) have also written that Rod Brown's acrylic paintings also add to the compelling nature of the text. They have both noted that Brown's rich acrylic paintings offer abundant visual support to the powerful representation of slavery that appears in the text. Morrison notes that Brown's clever use of light and darkness in the paintings play a powerful role in representing mood in the text, and Rochman has written that Brown uses color well to help represent the brutality and oppressive nature of slavery. Shange and Brown do not shy away from representing the horrors of slavery through their contributions to neo-slave narratives.

### **Summary of *Freedom's a-Callin me***

*Freedom's a-Callin me* is a picture book that contains a collection of fifteen poems and paintings that represent various slave experiences. The poems present various narratives about this topic from the initial decision to escape, to the horrific danger of flight, to the excitement of finding freedom. In *Freedom's a-Callin me* Shange and Brown pair paintings and poems to illuminate the horrors of slavery and the burning desire many enslaved Black to escape north to freedom. Throughout the text there are poems and paintings that represent work in the fields, cruel whippings, flight through the woods, the pursuit of escaped slaves by bloodhounds and slave hunters, and other horrors that slaves faced. Shange's free verse poems are short, compact, and powerful, with

single words carrying as much weight as lengthy phrases. Though they're free verse, there is a musicality to the rhythm and its portrayal of a breathless, anguished voice that begs to be read aloud. Brown's rich acrylic paintings, one illustrating each poem, offer abundant visual support. His acrylic paintings are very detailed and vary in size from a full page to three-fourth of a spread to a full spread. Together they give a strong sense of the terror, danger, and resolve of those who dared to try to escape from slavery.

### **Exercise of Power Among Characters**

All the poems in *Freedom's a-Callin me* are told from first-person point of view. The poems, which are all narrated by an enslaved young Black man, present his various experiences of living under the institution of slavery. It is through this young man that readers discover how the characters that appear throughout the text experienced the institution of slavery. Using the first-person point of view is useful in *Freedom's a-Callin me* because it allows readers to inhabit the fictional character. In *Freedom's a-Callin me* readers are presented with a narrative that allows them to hear about and witness slavery from the enslaved young man's point of view. By featuring the Black slave voice, the text presents a narrative that positions a Black person living under slavery as an authority on the institution.

#### **The Narrator.**

The narrator, an enslaved young man, presents details about his own experiences and those of other slaves living under slavery in *Freedom's a-Callin Me*. In the first poem in the text, which bears the same name as the title of the book, he is positioned as a victim because he is forced to work in a cotton field under the watch of a White overseer. However, in this poem, the character also actively questions his circumstance and is



ready to change it. The young narrator recognizes the opportunity arises to carry out this attempt when the White overseer “gets his hands busy” (p. 3) beating another slave in the field and stops looking over to where he is working. Recognizing the situation as his “chance to get right out of there” (p. 3), he “mixes [himself in] low in the cotton . . . close to the dirt [and then] winds . . . like a snake [until he is off the plantation]” (p. 3). After this, he comes to a place where he “swims across a stream” (p. 3), which will cause “them dogs to lose [his] scent” (p. 3). In the final part of the poem the young narrator goes on to share what happens next in his flight. He becomes hungry, tired, and cold, and hides out in an abandoned shanty. However, even with these challenges, Shange ends the poem with the words “good Lawd, [I am happy] ah may be free” (p. 3). In the opening poem, Shange represents the young enslaved narrator as determined to escape his status as a victim through flight.

In the second poem, the narrative about the young narrator’s life under slavery continues. Again the young man is positioned as a victim. In the poem “Never Again”, the young narrator shares how he escaped for a time, but was recaptured and severely beaten for his flight from the plantation. In this poem and the accompanying illustration, readers are presented with gruesome details about the brutal beating that the narrator receives at the hand of the White overseer.

During this beating, the White overseer screams that he will teach the young man that he will “never again” (p. 4) try to escape. Shange begins the poem with a metaphor and a descriptive adjective to vividly capture the harsh nature of the beating. The young narrator shares that the White overseer has him “hanging like a hog or fresh beef” (p. 4) and that he is “wiggling under a rawhide whip” (p. 4). This description of the beating is

illuminated further with a detailed painting that is coupled with the poem. Brown's striking painting shows the young narrator with his hands bounded and a scarred back hanging from the chain that is secured against a wall. Behind him the White overseer is swinging a rawhide whip towards his back (see Figure 10). The painting unflinchingly shows the brutal nature of beatings that slaves endured.

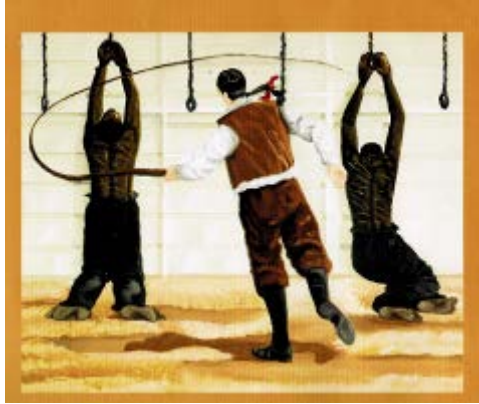


Figure 10. Illustration by Rod Brown from *Freedom's a-Callin me*.

However, while the beginning of poem represents how violence was used to punish the young man so that he would remain in place as a slave, it concludes with details that illustrate his determination to resist his condition. In the second part of the poem the White overseer punishes him “to scare him” (p. 4) and screams “never again” (p. 4) the words “fall on deaf ears” (p. 4). Although there is “blood sliding down [his] back [and] welts rising up [his] arms” (p. 4), the young narrator shares that he will still “try again [and that he knows that finding] freedom ain’t an easy road to hoe” (p. 4). Furthermore, he notes that when the overseer says never again, he feels “like laughing in his face” (p. 3). Shange depicts the young narrator is truly determined to resist his condition as a slave.

Throughout the remainder of *Freedom's a-Callin me*, the young narrator shares his experiences about his additional attempts to resist and take flight. After “Never Again,” he shares details about fleeing again in a poem titled “Time Tuh Go”. In this poem, he

shares that he recognizes the danger of the act, but is willing to do whatever is necessary to gain his freedom. He notes that although he “does not want to be a killer [he may have to] kill somebody” (p.8) to be free. The boy’s thinking represents him as someone who is very unfaltering in his quest to be free. He is willing find his way to freedom by any means necessary, even if it means taking someone else’ s life.

The remaining poems in *Freedom’s a-Callin me* continue to present the unnamed narrator resisting slavery through his flight towards freedom. In “Look for the Broken Branch” he shares details about the difficult task of finding folks on the Underground Railroad. He says, “ah looking for a White man who got a clue for me to get to freedom, what ever it is, [however] how can ah know what White man to trust” (p.11). Then, in the poem “The Swamp” he shares how he narrowly escapes the trackers and their dogs who want to drag him back to his master. After this, in another poem, titled “The Hole” he has to hide in a hole in the house of a White resister on the Underground Railroad to escape the hunters who are still tracking him. Then, in “Nearly There” he hides in the back of a wagon driven by another White resister who successfully helps him make his way to free land even though at the beginning of the trip there are hunters on their trail who are shooting at them.

With the final two poems, “Welcome to Michigan” and “Free Air,” White resisters again play a role in helping the boy resist slavery. In “Welcome to Michigan” readers discover that the young man is welcomed to Michigan, a free land, by White folks and then in “Free Air” he celebrates his freedom and reflects how he managed to escape slavery. So through a compilation of poems the young unnamed narrator is positioned as a victim who attempts to resist his position by escaping slavery. While this resistance is

first thwarted, similar to the other two texts analyzed in the sections above, eventually, the main character successfully finds his way towards freedom.

### **The White Overseer.**

In the first poem “Freedom’s a-Callin me” and the second poem “Never Again,” a White overseer represent those who worked to maintain the system of slavery. In these poems the White overseer is positioned in the first subject position of the power continuum: domination. The poems present him as someone controls and manipulates Black slaves and dehumanizes them to maintain the institution of slavery. These practices benefit the overseer over time. In “Freedom’s a-Callin me” the young enslaved narrator shares how the White overseer dominates the slaves in the fields by using “that whip that bounces off somebody’s back” (p. 3) and by sending his dogs to hunt down those who have attempted to runaway. In “Never Again” readers witness what an overseer does to slaves who run away. As noted earlier, in the poem he hangs the unnamed narrator “like a hog or fresh beef” (p. 4) and beats him savagely for running away. The White overseer’s dominance is explicitly portrayed as he beats the young narrator to the point that his back is scarred with “welts rising up his arms [and] blood sliding down [his] back” (p. 4).

The graphic written descriptions that illustrate the overseer’s dominant position are supported by the illustrations that accompany the poems. In the illustration that is coupled with “Freedom’s a-Callin me”, the White overseer is depicted atop his horse and brings down his whip across a Black slave in the fields. Similarly, as noted earlier, in the poem that accompanies “Never Again”, Brown visually represents the beating of the young narrator. In both paintings one of the main instruments used by slave owners and supporters to maintain their dominance over Black slaves is on display.

### **John Tanner, the Slave Tracker.**

In a poem titled “Slave Tracker” another character is positioned from a dominant position. In this poem the young enslaved narrator represents John Tanner, the slave tracker as a manipulative, treacherous, cruel, and violent person who does whatever it takes to maintain the oppressive system of slavery because he benefits from it. He is described in the poem as treacherous because in his hunt to return Blacks to slavery in the South and he “doesn’t care about manumission papers or papers [which can] show that you had bought your freedom” (p. 17).

He is also characterized as a man who would “just as soon shoot you as sell you downriver where Blacks were used to whippings, [other] nasty overseers” (p. 17). To further illustrate this characterization the young narrator shares that Tanner pulled infants from their parent’s arms and carried them off and that “everybody of color turned they head down” (p. 17) when he came around. In allowing the young narrator to describe Tanner in this way, Shange illustrates the acts of dominance that White overseers used to maintain and oppressive system of slavery. She shows how White men like Tanner used acts of dominance to collaborate with slave owners to make sure that the slavery continued to exist during the antebellum period.

The painting that is paired with “Slave Tracker” not only supports this representation, it presents readers with some additional tools of the trade that men like Tanner used to exert his dominance over slaves. In the painting, Tanner stands in front of a building that has a runaway slave advertisement posted that reads \$100 Reward for Tom. Next to him is a bloodhound, which was the breed of dog that was often used to hunt runaway slaves during antebellum times, and at his feet is a ball and chain. In his

hands he holds a shotgun and at his waist is a pistol.

Readers are presented with an image of a dominant slave tracker who works to keep Blacks in bondage. John Tanner, the slave tracker, continues to appear in poems throughout the text. In fact, he is mentioned in six out of the seven final poems. In each of these poems his actions remain the same: He is on the hunt to drag the unnamed narrator and other runaway slaves back into bondage.

### **Sojourner Truth.**

Sojourner Truth is also represented in one of the poems titled “Death or Freedom” as a conscious resister who is known for working to help others resist slavery. She is described as a legend who is willing to die to help others gain their freedom. She is positioned as someone who is consciously aware of the consequences that she could face for helping others to resist slavery. However, despite this recognition the poem represents her as a resister who is willing to die so that others may be free.

In the poem readers are presented with a narrative that focuses on Sojourner leading “four colored folk and a beautiful colored child [on a] march to freedom” (p. 14). During the representation of this march readers are offered details that present Sojourner as a resister with courage to help others find freedom by any means necessary. In leading the five runways to freedom, Sojourner’s deep courage and commitment is displayed as she “whips out a pistol” (p. 17). The image is vividly represented in the illustration that accompanies the poem. In it Sojourner pushes a pistol into the face of Black man who they have come across as they are sneaking through the woods.

After whipping out the pistol the young narrator shares that Sojourner tells the Black man that “either you coming with us or you die here because we going and you

ain't telling nobody nothing about us" (p. 17). After this, the poem ends with Sojourner making the hammer of the gun click in the face of the Black man as she says to him "death or freedom [and that] it won't be the first time" (p. 17). The implication at the ending of this poem is that Truth is indeed willing to do anything necessary to help Black slaves gain freedom even if it means killing a slave who might report her act of resistance to those who seek to uphold the institution of slavery. Essentially, the poem positions her as determined and rebellious resister who is steadfast in her work to challenge the oppressive system of slavery.

### **The Sacrificed Slave.**

In the poem "The Sacrifice" another runaway slave, who bears no name, is positioned as a victim attempting to resist the dominating and dehumanizing institution of slavery through flight. However, in this poem readers witness the dire consequences for those who attempted to resist the institution of slavery by running away from it. In the poem the runaway slave is caught by John Tanner, the slave tracker, in a swamp and tortured to death. After his gruesome death, which is witnessed by other runaways slaves who are pictured hiding in the distance in the painting that accompanies "The Sacrifice", readers learn that they "comfort each other [and] weep" (p.19) because the runaway slave has been killed..

The young narrator shares that "one of us didn't make it to freedom, the tracker caught his ankle in the swamp like an alligator [then] shoot him in the head" (p.19). After this, the narrator goes on to point out that after the other runaways have witnessed the horrible act for a time they "contemplate on the torturous death of the [man and have] much grief on the way to freedom" (p. 19). Because his capture served as a distraction so

that they could quietly escape the tracker and continue on their flight towards freedom, he died so that they could continue to escape. The grief that the runaway slaves feel after witnessing the death of the sacrificed is illustrated by two darkly colored paintings that are paired with the poem. The first shows three runaways sobbing with the hands over their face in the woods (see Figure 11) and the second shows the same group hugging each other tightly in front of a small cabin (see Figure 12).

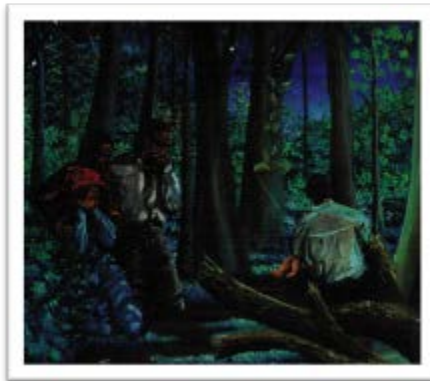


Figure 11. Illustration by Rod Brown from *Freedom's a-Callin me*.



Figure 12. Illustration by Rod Brown from *Freedom's a-Callin me*.

The first painting illustrates the group's reaction immediately after the death of the sacrificed and the second appears to show them remembering the even sometime later after they have found their way to freedom.



### **The Financier.**

In one of the poems titled “The Financier” Shange and Brown introduce an abolitionist who is positioned as conscious resister working to help Blacks escape from slavery. In the poem Shange illustrates that not all White people accepted the institution of slavery. She uses the financier as character to represent how Whites resisted the institution and illuminates that although the financier looks like his White slave master he certainly does not behave like him. Furthermore, he points out that if this master knew what the financier did “he [would] have him killed” (p. 23). In this poem the financier is clearly positioned as a conscious resister. He is a wealthy White abolitionist who “gives money to run the Underground Railroad” (p. 23). He does not have a problem financially supporting the Underground Railroad because he is a wealthy. Shange attempts to make his wealthy status apparent to readers by writing that he has “fine china and wine glasses, nice teacups, and good manners” (p. 23). Despite his position of comfort and privilege as a wealthy White man, the financier is willing to put himself at risk to help Blacks escape slavery on the Underground Railroad. During the antebellum period White anti-slavery activists and allies in the South who were discovered often faced resistance that came in the form of the boycott of business, destruction of property, or physical attack.

Furthermore, in some instances White abolitionists who assisted runaways were killed.

In the poem readers learn from the young unnamed narrator that while he is in his flight it is the financier who allows him to hide in a hole under the floorboards of his house and does not turn him in when the slave tracker arrives at his financier’s door. At the end of the poem, the narrator shares that holding the idea that all should be free was very dangerous. He also notes that the financier is willing to become an ally to help make

the idea a reality because to him the “[Blacks] lives [and freedom] are as important as theirs” (p. 23).

In this poem the financier represents White allies who worked to help Blacks escape slavery. The inclusion of financier in the text allows readers to consider complex race and class relations under the institution of slavery. The freedoms that Whites resisters enjoyed under the slave system provided them opportunities to help Blacks who were attempting to escape slavery in unique ways. For instance, because Whites were scrutinized and observed far less than Blacks, their homes could often serve as ideal hiding places for runaways. Additionally, because they were allowed to read and write, and therefore had much higher literacy rates, Whites could play a crucial role in creating fake travel passes or freedom papers that Black runaway slaves could use in their attempted flights towards freedom.

While the *Whiteness* of White allies played a crucial role in the gains that Black resisters made against slavery, wealth was also very important. Wealthy White resisters were positioned to help Black runaways in distinct ways because of their socio-economic standing. As noted in this poem it is the White financier’s money that helped to fund the Underground Railroad. Without money to buy food, clothing, or other necessities along the way, the journey would have been much more difficult. “The Financier” poem represents the assertions that the respect, access, and means that White men like the financier had in their communities must have also played a crucial role in determining some of the successful escapes that Blacks runaways made out of slavery.

### **The White Man in the Wagon.**

In *Freedom’s a-Callin me* another White character is introduced in the poem titled

“Nearly There” who is positioned as a conscious resister who transports the narrator towards freedom. The danger of being a resister is represented in the poem when the wagon is set upon by the White slave trackers who are shooting and riding towards them. Yet, the White man in the wagon keeps moving because they are nearly there. The poem ends with the readers not knowing whether the White man in the wagon and the unnamed narrator have escaped their pursuers.

However, after “Nearly There” ends, in a subsequent poem, readers learn that that they do escape their pursuers and arrive in the free land of Michigan. In the poem titled “Welcome To Michigan” the White Man in the wagon introduces the boy to other unnamed White resisters who welcome him to Michigan and begin to orient him to his new life in a free land. These White resisters, a White man and woman, are illustrated and mentioned and only are represented in one stanza of the poem. However, they continue to illustrate the alliance that existed between Blacks and Whites in the fight for freedom during the antebellum period. They represent one way that Black and Whites came together in the antebellum period to wage a biracial assault against slavery.

### **A Critical Examination of Gender, Race, and Class**

As a self-proclaimed Black feminist, poet Ntozanke Shange again explores issues connected to gender and race in *Freedom's a-Callin me*. Although the text focuses primarily on the Black male experience in slavery, Shange includes one poem in the collection that represents Black women as central figures in resistance acts that were carried out against the institution of slavery. In “Death or Freedom” Sojourner Truth is positioned as an agent of change who was willing to do whatever it took to help other Black slaves find their way to freedom. She is at the forefront of this narrative and

characterized as a “legend” (p. 17). Putting a Black woman in a leading position where she relies on herself to facilitate change instead of Black men or Whites, is in line with Shange’s other fictional works that primarily foreground the experiences of women of color. Many of her fictional works have been recognized as texts that seek to empower women to take responsibility for their lives by learning to love themselves and challenging their oppressors.

In “Death or Freedom” Shange represents a Black woman seeking challenge the institution of slavery by helping Blacks escape the institution. In the poem the young narrator represents Sojourner Truth as a woman willing do whatever it takes to help Black slaves escape slavery. She illustrates this commitment by implying that Sojourner has even used a gun to kill so that Black slaves could be free. Shange uses the poem to foreground the experiences of Sojourner Truth and to position Black women living during the antebellum period as strong, determined, and courageous.

In the poem, Sojourner’s determination, courage, and by- any-means-necessary attitude is represented as she stands up to a Black male slave who she assumes might tell somebody about her role in assisting enslaved Black families off a plantation. Standing in the woods “she whips out a pistol” (p. 17) and tells him “either you coming with us or you [will] die” (p. 17). This representation is also illustrated in the page and half painting that accompanies the poem. In the painting a stern eyed Sojourner is centered on the page with a pistol in her hand, which is pointed into the face of the Black man, who she assumes might report her act of resistance (see Figure 13). This painting also includes a visual representation of the slave family that she is leading off the plantation, who stand silently behind her as they wait for her determine what will happen next on their journey

towards freedom. Shange makes a point to describe the girl who is a part of the family led off the plantation as a “beautiful colored chile” (p. 17). In considering Shange’s body of work and her commitment Black feminist thought, describing the Black girl in this manner is similar to the representations of many of the Black women that appear in her body of fictional work.



Figure 13. Illustration by Rod Brown from *Freedom’s a-Callin me*.

Based on the poem “Death or Freedom”, Black women are beautiful, strong, determined, courageous, and were in leading positions in the resistance against slavery during the antebellum period. Shange and Brown’s Sojourner in “Death or Freedom” does the same work to counter proslavery stereotypes that the Black female protagonists in *Sojourner Truth’s Step-Stomp Stride* and *Moses: When Harriet led Her People to Freedom*. Like the Pinkney’s Sojourner and Weatherford and Nelson’s Harriet she is strong and courageous. She is not content with slavery and takes a central role or leading position in the resistance movement against slavery.

However, although a Sojourner Truth is the central character in “Death or Freedom” in the remainder of the poems throughout the text Black women are not at the center of the narrative. Instead, Black men are at the center. In fact, because the poems in

*Freedom's a-Callin me* are told from perspective of an unnamed young Black male slave who shares many details about his life under slavery and his escape and he appears in most of the illustrations the text is primarily focused on the male experience under slavery. In *Freedom's a-Callin me*, except for the representation of Sojourner Truth in "Death or Freedom" and the mention of women working in the fields in "The North Star" the construction of Black womanhood in collection of poems the text is somewhat limited.

Throughout the text, the unnamed young male narrator primarily shares his own experience in slavery and, when he does share information about others, it is mostly about men. He shares details about the White male overseer and tracker and informs readers about the oppression that a number of other Black male slaves face on the plantation. Shange also allows the unnamed narrator to share information about White men who helped Blacks find freedom. There are details about a White male financier, a White man in a wagon, a White man who welcomes runaway slaves to Michigan. The foregrounding of men is also apparent in the paintings featured in *Freedom's a-Callin me*. Throughout the text, it is primarily Black men who are featured in the illustrations. While women appear in five of the eighteen illustrations, besides the one that accompanies "Death and Freedom" and "Time To Guh" they are on the periphery.

*Freedom's a-Callin me* also makes represents race in a manner that is similar to other texts featured in this study. It challenges the assertion of the docile slave who was content to remain in slavery. Throughout *Freedom's a-Callin me* Shange and Brown present poems and paintings that represent Blacks who are certainly not content with lives under slavery. The poems "Death or Freedom", "Freedom's a-callin me", "The

North Star”, “The Sacrifice”, “The Hole”, “Nearly There”, and “Free Air” Black can be read as a counter narratives that challenge the discourse of the contented slave because they evocatively represent the Black slaves’ unflinching quest for freedom. These poems reflect the burning desire of many enslaved Blacks to be free . . . and also show the strength and courage they used to attain it” (Courtot, 2012, p. 40). To the book reviewer Hazel Rochman (2012), the sense of urgency that Black slaves felt about attaining freedom clearly shines through in “Freedom’s a-Callin me” and “Death or Freedom” and Hope Morrison (2012) notes that many of the poems in *Freedom’s a-Callin me* use the young narrator’s voice to shine a spotlight on the deep desire of Black slave to claim their freedom.

I agree with Rochman and Morrison: The representation of the discontented slave is foregrounded in the text as most of the poems serve as a testament to the history of those Black slaves who were determined not to live their lives in servitude. In these poems the narrator continuously communicates the desire that Black slaves to be free. For instance, in the poems noted above the young narrator comments about looking for a chance to escape, the dangerous journey in flight, and the hope of finding freedom.

Many of the illustrations throughout *Freedom’s a-Callin me* also support the representation of the desire and determination of Black slaves to be free. In the first illustration in the text, which introduces the collection of poems, the young narrator walks along a path that leads towards the woods (see Figure 14) In this opening illustration, the representation of the young narrator leaving the plantation from the woods because freedom is calling him is represented. In the second illustration, which accompanies the poem “Freedom’s a-Callin me” and begins the narrative about the young

narrator's eventual flight towards freedom, the young narrator is centered in a painting in which he is looking off in the distance because he recognizes that he may have a chance to escape (see Figure 15).

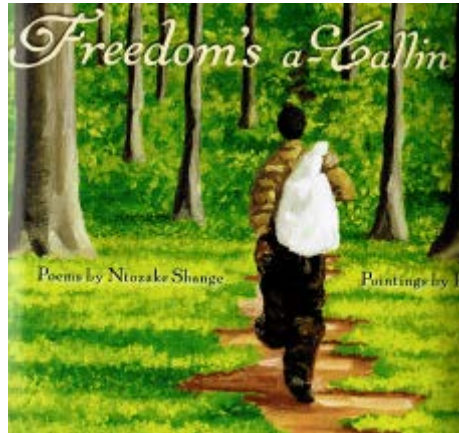


Figure 14. Illustration by Rod Brown from *Freedom's a-Callin me*.



Figure 15. Illustration by Rod Brown from *Freedom's a-Callin me*.

Although, in the distance at the periphery of the painting there is a White man whipping another slave, Brown does not represent the main character looking at this horrible beating, like the other Black slaves in the scene. Instead, he is looking off into a distance because freedom is calling him. Brown's representation of the main character in the painting illustrates that even the threat of the whip could not deter some Blacks pondering about their escape towards freedom.

After this, in the painting that accompanies 'Time Tuh Go' Brown presents an



image of two slaves preparing for a flight towards freedom by gathering provisions that they have hidden under the floorboards of their quarters (see Figure 16). The visual representation of the Black Slaves attempting to escape continues throughout the text.



*Figure 16. Illustration by Rod Brown from Freedom's a-Callin me.*

In the painting (see Figure 17) that is paired with the poem titled “North Star” Brown depicts four slaves using the stars as a compass because they will “lead them to freedom somewhere away from here” (p. 7).



*Figure 17. Illustration by Rod Brown from Freedom's a-Callin me.*

Similarly, another painting (see Figure 18) that is paired with the poem ‘Stranger in the Woods’ illustrates the young enslaved narrator hiding behind a large oak tree so that



Figure 18. Illustration by Rod Brown from *Freedom's a-Callin me*.

he can remain “one step ahead of the trackers and them wicked dogs [that] tear muscle right from bone” (p. 11). Then, on a few pages later, there is another illustration that again shows the young enslaved narrator trying to escape his pursuers by hiding under the floorboards in a house that was a stop on the Underground Railroad (see Figure 19). A number of reviewers have noted that Brown does an excellent job of rendering



Figure 19. Illustration by Rod Brown from *Freedom's a-Callin me*.

the strong sense of the terror, danger, and resolve of those who dared to run. According to Marilyn Courtot (2012) this sense of dread that readers may get from some of Brown's paintings in *Freedom's a-Callin me* derives from his use of color. She notes that in paintings that illustrate “Stranger in the Wood”, “The Hole” “North Star”, and “The Sacrifice” are dark in color to represent the dismay, dread, and terror that these runaways felt about the unknown.

These darkly colored paintings which are presented are in contrast to the brightly colored paintings that exist at the end *Freedom's a-Callin me* which accompany the poems about the young narrator finding his way into, as Ntzoake Shange puts it, “Free Air”. These brightly colored illustrations seem to signal the exhilaration, happiness, and relief that the main character must have felt (see Figure 20). Unlike most of the earlier paintings in the text, which are dark in color and are depictions of night, the illustrations at the end of *Freedom's a-Callin me* are bathed in different shades of bright yellow and are set during the daytime.



Figure 20. Illustration by Rod Brown from *Freedom's a-Callin me*.

Overall, the primary portrayals of Blacks living during slavery times found in *Freedom's a-Callin me* is very similar to two texts examined in the previous sections. Again, although positioned as victims, the Blacks in this text are not content with their status and tenaciously work towards finding their way into freedom. The representation is certainly featured in the narrative told by the young Black narrator as he shares his story about his journey from slavery to slavery to freedom in the series of poems found in the text.

*Freedom's a-Callin me* also contains characterizations of Whites who are similar to those found in *Sojourner Truth's Step-Stomp Stride* and *Moses: When Harriet Led Her People to Freedom*. Again, there is the representation of a White person who attempts to

maintain the system of slavery through dominance and violence and others who seek to challenge it through their collaboration with Black runaway slaves. In *Freedom's a-Callin me* John Tanner, the slave tracker and the overseer are constructed as violent, callous, manipulative White men who help maintain slavery through domination. The representation of White men in this manner serves as a counter narrative to proslavery assertion that White masters, overseers, and other supporters of the institution were kind and caring towards Black slaves. As Hazel Rochman (2012) notes, in *Freedom's a-Callin me* words and pictures never downplay the cruelty of slavery in the United States. The violence that was carried out by Whites against Blacks during slavery is clearly represented in *Freedom's a-Callin me*.

For example, as noted earlier, in the poem "Freedom's a-Callin me" Shange represents the White overseer as someone who uses violence to keep Black slaves in their place. In this poem Shange writes that he uses a "whip that bounces off somebody's back" (p. 3) and then in another poem, "Never Again" he hangs the unnamed narrator and another slave "like hogs or fresh beef" (p. 4) and beats them savagely running away. John Tanner, the slave tracker, also is constructed to counter the idea of caring and kind supporters of slavery. He is represented as a "treacherous" (p. 17) White man because in his hunt to return Blacks to slavery in the South and he "doesn't care about manumission papers or papers [which can] show that you had bought your freedom" (p. 17). His cruel nature is also rendered through his actions: The narrator shares that "just as soon shoot you as sell you downriver where Blacks were used to whippings, [other] nasty overseers" (p. 17) and pulled infants from parents' arms and carried them off.

Brown also attempts to capture the cruel nature of these White men who supported

slavery by explicitly representing their acts of violence and oppression with his paintings. For instance in the poem that is paired with “Never Again”, Brown paints a horrific picture of two bloody beatings of the young narrator being whipped by a White overseer. In another painting, which accompanies the poem titled “Slave Tracker”, he depicts John Tanner and another man, who are the slave trackers, with the tools of their awful trade, which were used to capture, punish, and kill runaway Black slaves (see Figure 21).



Figure 21. Illustration by Rod Brown from *Freedom's a-Callin me*.

In the painting that accompanies the poem “The Swamp” Brown also illustrates another way that runaway Blacks were drawn back into bondage. Four bloodhounds are featured prominently in this painting (see Figure 22). In the days of slavery, bloodhounds were bred and trained to track and sometimes kill runaway slaves.

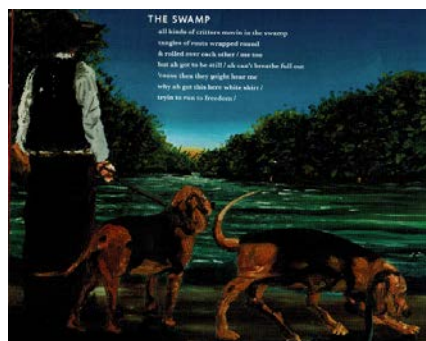


Figure 22. Illustration by Rod Brown from *Freedom's a-Callin me*.

However, Shange and Brown do balance this representation of cruel White men with the incorporation of White people who aided Black runaway slaves in their escape.

The White financier and the White man in the wagon are not cruel or violent towards Blacks. Instead, both men risk much to help Blacks resist the institution of slavery. Furthermore, in the final two poems and paintings, through words and images Brown and Shange represent White allies who welcome the young narrator and other runaways to the free land of Michigan. In ending the text with the poem “Free Air”, the young narrator communicates that there have been “kindly White souls who riskin life so we could have ours” (p. 30). In representing these White folks in this manner, Shange shows that there were some Whites who also join the acts of resistance against slavery.

### **Production Practices of *I Lay My Stitches Down: Poems of American Slavery***

The fourth book featured in this study, *I Lay My Stitches Down: Poems of American Slavery*, was written by poet Cynthia Grady (2012) and illustrated by award-winning artist Michele Wood. Similar to *Freedom’s a-Calling me*, *I Lay My Stitches Down: Poems of American Slavery* represents slavery through poetry and paintings. However, the text differs from *Freedom’s a-Callin me* because it is not a collection of poems that presents a linear narrative with one protagonist. Instead, it is a collection of independent narratives about various characters whose slave experiences are represented through fourteen poems.

Furthermore, *I Lay My Stitches Down: Poems of American Slavery* varies from *Freedom a-Callin me* as a collection of poems and paintings about the institution because Grady and Wood explicitly draw on elements of the quilt-making process in their construction of this text. In a preface, Grady notes that there are similarities between quilt making and poetry writing. She points out that in both processes there is an arrangement of colors and shapes into a pattern, and there is also a keen focus on the presentation of

process structures. According to Grady, the quilt-making process was instrumental and informative in guiding the construction of the book.

Grady's free-verse poems about the African slave experience consist of 10 lines of 10 syllables in each line, as laid out on the page, mimic the square shape of a quilt block. In each poem Grady incorporates a spiritual reference, a musical reference, and a sewing or fiber arts reference into each poem, to reflect the three layers of a quilt.

Michele Wood, who is the recipient of a Coretta Scott King Award for her illustrations of Toyomi Igus' *I See the Rhythm* (2005), also draws on the quilt-making process to provide single acrylic paintings that are paired with each poem. Wood stitches specific quilt patterns into her depictions of the hardworking children, bereft parents, escaped slaves, horse trainers, and musicians who voice the poems throughout the text.

Along with the poems and paintings, *I Lay My Stitches Down: Poems of American Slavery* also includes brief historical commentaries with each pairing. The poems are located on the left page, while the illustrations are located on the right. Underneath each poem, there is a row of quilt patches that represent or symbolize some aspect of the poem with historical commentary displayed below each poem. *I Lay My Stitches Down* consists of 34 pages in this unique picture-book format. An informative introduction, as well as a detailed author's note and illustrator's note are included, along with references.

Because of this approach, Toyomi Igus' *I See the Rhythm* (2005), has acknowledged that the text takes a new and unique approach to representing the institution of slavery for young readers. She maintains that the text is "truly a work in which the sum is greater than the parts, and, like the pieces of a patchwork quilt, the individual elements of verse, art, and background information come together to tell a much greater story" (p. 26).

The Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC), *Kirkus*, *Language Arts*, and *School Library Journal* have also recognized *I Lay My Stitches Down: Poems of American Slavery* as a distinct and noteworthy picture book. According to the CCBC, it is an eloquently written and illustrated volume that features poems that represent the tragedy of slavery in a powerful and informative way. Nancy Tolson (2012) has also written that it is a noteworthy text because of its unique representation of slavery. She points out that the book would be an excellent source for an American history class for young readers who are eight to twelve years old. Furthermore, to Tolson, the time spent reading the poetry, identifying the visual patterns throughout the artwork, and reading the informative passages on each page makes the book a great attraction and contribution to any school or public library.

Ironically, Cynthia Grady, who works in a middle school as a librarian, created the text because she believed that it could be an appealing and useful text for teachers exploring the complex history of slavery with their students. Grady noted that idea for *I Lay My Stitches Down: Poems of American Slavery* came to her while she was preparing to teach a quilt class to a group of middle school students. In a 2012 interview with her publicist, Grady stated that:

While I drafted the pattern for a block called Underground Railroad, a line came to me: "the hunter ain't no match for this old pilgrim in the woods." It was a little weird, but I kept drawing. Then it happened again: "my thimble, thread, and needle comfort me." This line happens to be perfect iambic pentameter. I became excited, While I worked on another block my muse visited one more time: "The teacher catch us making letters in the dirt with sticks. [Then], I knew I had to write some poems about slavery. I wanted to create a picture book. [I also knew] I would need a minimum of 14-16 poems for a picture book to work. (Eerdword, 2012, blogpost)

For Grady, this experience coupled with her recognition of her young students' interest in quilting and their love for poetry inspired her to write *I Lay My Stitches Down: Poems of*



*American Slavery*. She felt that it could be a thoughtful and unique way to get students to begin to engage deeply in the study of the history of slavery in the United States.

Michele Wood was also drawn to the project because she believed that it could offer opportunities for young people to explore the early U.S. history. For Wood, the project provided also her with an opportunity to learn more about her heritage and to “give [Black] slaves dignity because it was so often taken away from them” (Michele Wood, 2014). Wood also committed to the project because she wants to “continue to educate children about how much African Americans have contributed to society and to the United States through with her art” (Wood, 2014).

### **Summary of *I Lay My Stitches Down: Poems of American Slavery***

*I Lay My Stitches Down: Poems of American Slavery* is a picture book in which poet Cynthia Grady and painter Michele Wood draw upon spirituality, music, and quilting traditions to create a collection of fourteen poems that convey the hardships and hopes of Blacks living under the institution of slavery. The poems are followed by an expository paragraph that present additional details about the aspect of slavery conveyed in free verse prose. The poems are breathtaking and evoke powerful imagery that is often echoed in the accompanying stylized illustrations created by Michelle Wood. Wood’s fourteen dramatic and colorful paintings complement the poems and educational passages. The combined poems, paragraphs, and paintings represent various aspects of the living conditions under slavery. There are details about life in the slave quarter and in the fields. There are representations that convey what it was like for escaped slaves on the Underground Railroad and those who used the North Star to navigate to freedom. There are also poems that represent the harsh punishment and work that slave faced within the

plantation household. While others represent what life was like for very young slaves and convey the horrors of parents who had their children taken away by their masters. The poems reflect the rich patchwork of experiences and circumstances of enslaved African Americans.

### **Exercise of Power Among Characters**

Half of the poems in *I Lay My Stitches Down: Poems from American Slavery* are told from first-person point of view, while the other half are presented in third-person. In the poems that are written from first-person point of view, several slaves offer details about their lives under slavery. The details describe what they see, hear, do, think, and feel. In the other poems, an unnamed narrator, whose gender is not revealed, describes how different slaves experienced the institution. In these poems the unnamed narrator reports the narratives found in the poems from the third-person objective point of view. There is no intrusion into the minds of the characters. The narrator does not share their thoughts with the readers. Instead, the narrator focuses on telling about what the characters see, hear, and do.

#### **Archeologists.**

The first poem and painting in *I Lay My Stitches Down: Poems from American Slavery* introduces a group of archeologists of color, one man and two women, who are positioned as individuals with agency, seeking to recover the history of African Americans who lived under slavery. The poem, which is titled “Log Cabin”, illustrates how archeologists have worked to uncover this history by examining the artifacts that they left behind. The unnamed narrator states “some chicken bones, the skins, and skulls of coons and squirrels - hard remains of suppers stalked by moonlight, faith, and

starvation” and “the sea shell, broken beads, and bundled roots suggests how slaves survived” (p. 2). With “Log Cabin” she presents a poem that reveals how the “finds of archeologist beneath dilapidated cabins down on a hill” (p. 2) can provide us clues about how Blacks lived under slavery.

By beginning the text with this poem, Grady represents the archeologists as characters who are working to discover the history of Black slaves, many of whom did not write down details about their lives. The painting that accompanies the poem and historical commentary shows the three archeologists, in front of ten dilapidated cabins, hunkered over and beginning the work of artifact cleaning (see Figure 23). It visually



*Figure 23.* Illustration by Michele Wood from *I Lay My Stitches Down*.

illustrates the work that is a part of pasting pieces of the slave past together.

While many contemporary historians have used primary sources such as plantation records, contemporary accounts, abolitionist writings, and the Works Progress Administration (WPA) slave narratives to understand slave life in the United States, Grady and Wood show that there are other means that have been used to inquire into those times. By beginning the text with this representation Wood and Grady are representing the role that archeology can play in unearthing the realities of slave life in a manner that addresses some of the concerns about the sources that have been used in the

historical study of the institution. Daniel L. Fountain (1995) has written that, “for several legitimate reasons, the primary sources [used to discover slavery] are inadequate in telling a complete story” (Fountain, 1995, p. 67). He writes that:

Contemporary accounts and plantation records frequently reflect the interests of abolitionists organizations and or prejudices of a racist White dominated society; and slave autobiographies are criticized for being unrepresentative of the average slave experience on the grounds that their authors were primarily from an [overly] defiant and literate [segment], not the more cautious general population of the illiterate field hands. The fact that the majority of the WPA interviewers were White and their subjects paid has prompted scholars to raise questions about those who were interviewed felt secure enough to answer freely and frankly. (p. 67)

It is because of these concerns material culture assumes major importance when studying the history of slavery. Since the late 1960s historical archeologists have recovered evidence about Black slaves African heritage, diet, health, housing, literacy, social status, and means of resistance – aspects of their lives that were often hidden from their masters and overseers.

By beginning *I Lay My Stitches Down: Poems of American Slavery* with the work of archeologists Grady and Wood provide an opportunity for readers to reconsider the construction of history. They illustrate how archeology can aid us in piecing together a richer interpretation of the antebellum slave experience. In essence, they show the agency that such individuals can have in finding out details about the lives of Black slaves who were not afforded the opportunities to present their perspective about slavery by way of written materials.

### **Unnamed Slaves in “Cotton Boll”.**

A number of unnamed slaves appear as characters in thirteen of the fourteen poems found in *I Lay My Stitches Down: Poems of American Slavery*. In the second poem, four of these unnamed slaves, two males and two females, appear in an illustration that is

presented alongside a poem entitled “Cotton Boll”. Through the representation of these unnamed slaves and the painting that accompanies it, Grady and Wood seek to illustrate how some enslaved Blacks managed to survive hunger, sorrow, and heartache as victims of slavery.

The poem and painting position them as victims because they are enduring inhumane conditions. Grady writes that as slaves they experience “hunger, sorrow, and heartache” (p. 4) and Wood’s painting includes an image of one of these unnamed slaves whose face is downturned and somber. However, the poem “Cotton Boll” and the painting that accompanies it also represents the things that the unnamed slaves did to “soothe their soul” (p. 4) in response to the oppressive circumstance that they faced. The poem represents how enslaved Blacks sewed, played a variety of instruments (drum, flute, banjo), and prayed to their own god as a means to get a “restful breath” (p. 4) or a brief escape from the oppression of slavery. This message is also illustrated in Wood’s painting, which includes an unnamed slave playing a flute and standing in front of a drum, another playing a banjo, and another who is centered in the image making a Balm of Gilead (see Figure 24).

The painting also features an image of what appears to be a Black God. The Black God, who is rendered at the top of the illustration, hovers over the unnamed slaves and there is a ray of light coming from his eyes, which covers and soothes all the unnamed slaves. According to Wood, in the painting, the Black God shows his power as a healer.



*Figure 24. Illustration by Michele Wood from *I Lay My Stitches Down*.*

She notes that, “light of God is shining upon [them as they] as they go through [their] hard times and suffering. He is behind them to support them through difficult times” (Wood, 2014).

Additionally, Wood shows readers the Black God’s success in aiding the Black slaves by placing a dove at the bottom center of the painting. According to Wood, “the dove is symbol that represents peace” (Wood, 2014) and signals that in the midst of their storm [their god] is providing them with calmness, serenity, and composure that they need to survive the harsh conditions and oppression of slavery.

### **Unnamed Female Slave in “Birds in the Air”.**

In another poem titled “Birds in the Air” there is another representation about how Black slaves dealt with the oppressive nature of slavery. In “Birds in the Air” Grady represents a narrative that features an unnamed female house slave, who is positioned as a victim, finding comfort and food in the early morning hours amongst the birds in a small clearing behind the slave quarters. Grady again presents a narrative that aims to represent how the Blacks managed to mentally and spiritually survive under slavery. In the brief historical commentary that follows the poem, Grady writes that, “for Christian

slaves early morning was an especially hopeful time” (p.14). They believed this because “in the Bible, morning is the time of deliverance, of the ultimate victory of injustices suffered during life on earth” (p. 14).

Grady and Wood seek to present this idea through their representation of an unnamed female house slave in “Birds in the Air”. Wood illustrates the unnamed female slave with a smile on her face as she provides six colorful birds with food and gathers their eggs in a bag for herself. It is a peaceful and hopeful scene (see Figure 25). Grady writes that, “at morning hush . . . she’ll toss a pan of corn down behind the quarters [and then the] whistling pure and sharp. Like the wren’s song, she hits the grace note just so soon see wings aquiver, sky fills with birdsong . . . [then] in a makeshift nest they leave us their eggs” (p. 14).



*Figure 25. Illustration by Michele Wood from I Lay My Stitches Down.*

Similar to “Cotton Boll” it appears that Grady and Wood are seeking to represent details about the various ways that some enslaved Blacks managed to survive harshness of slavery. Although she is positioned as a victim because she is enslaved, Grady and

Wood again reveal the ways that she soothes her soul by listening and tending to the birds in the air. It is a representation that deviates from the familiar representation of the overtly defiant slave who is constantly thinking about, plotting, or enacting a flight towards freedom.

Furthermore, because she gathers eggs from the birds, Grady and Wood also represent another aspect of how Black slaves managed to deal with the difficult nature of slavery. She feeds them corn, builds birdhouses, and protects them from predators and in return they provide her with beautiful music and tasty eggs. It is these small returns that help her make it through her day as slave in the big House. The extra food was certainly needed because, as Herbert Covey and Dwight Eissach (2009) have asserted in their study about the ways food related to slave culture in the United States, the rations that were distributed to house slaves was not sufficient enough to provide them with an adequate diet.

Through “Birds in the Air” Grady and Wood illustrate that because of this, house slaves sometimes “kept chickens and a small garden, and they also found eggs in the nests of stray or wild turkeys, geese, and ducks (p. 14) to provide additional food for themselves. They represent that foraging for food was a necessary task that slaves had to carry out to survive slavery. Through “Birds in the Air” Grady and Wood provide another representation of how Black slaves endured under slavery. As a victim of slavery, the unnamed female slave is using her relationship with the birds and nature to help her to survive the oppression of the institution.



### **The Musicians.**

Additional representations of how Black slaves managed to mentally and spiritually survive the oppression of slavery also appear in other poems in the collection. For example, in the poem “Kaleidoscope”, nine unnamed slaves, who are musicians, are represented. Similar to the slave characters described in previous sections, they too are positioned as victims. In the narrative presented in the poem and the painting that accompanies it the unnamed slaves are again represented as victims seeking to find a bit of happiness and relief from their oppression.

In “Kaleidoscope”, Grady presents a narrative about nine slaves who make music during “the little time [that they] have to call [their] own” (p. 26). She writes that they make music by “shaking stones in a basket, clapping hands, stomping feet . . . [and by] sometimes playing a banjo and fiddle, or a hallowed-out tree drum and washboard” (p. 26). They also sing. There are “piercing shouts . . . to Bible stories . . . interweaving tunes and hollers, singing up a frenzy of song” (p. 26). Grady writes that this music “be a kaleidoscope of sound” (p. 26) and provides the nine unnamed Black slaves with gladness.

Wood represents the scene with a brightly colored painting that illustrates the musicians (five men and four women) in a circle wearing various shades of yellow and brown (see Figure 26). In this painting, Wood represents two of the unnamed slaves dancing with their hands in the air while the others are pictured singing and playing their instruments with their eyes closed. This depiction combined with the bright colors used for the painting signal the joy and peace that these they must have felt in that moment.



*Figure 26.* Illustration by Michele Wood from *I Lay My Stitches Down*.

So while the nine unnamed slaves in “Kaleidoscope” are positioned as victims because they are enslaved, Grady and Wood, again, represent them managing to find some joy despite their harsh circumstances. Again, it is a representation that moves away from the familiar representation of the runaway slave. Here, Grady and Wood add to the representations of slavery in found in children’s books by featuring what Black slaves may have done during the limited time that they could call their own.

In the historical commentary Grady writes that “most slaves worked for their masters before sunup until after sundown, six sometimes seven, days a week. . . some masters, however, allowed a break for their slaves on Saturday nights or Sundays” (p. 26). Presenting what they may have done during this time, beyond the familiar representation of the plot to escape, in “Kaleidoscope” causes readers to consider the wide range of experiences that slaves had under slavery.

### **The Basket Weaver.**

In another poem titled “The Basket” another unnamed slave is positioned as a victim who uses the limited time that she has to herself to do something that causes all her “troubles [under slavery] to fall away” (p. 28). Grady has the unnamed female slave

share a narrative about how she manages to find a brief escape from her living conditions under slavery. The weaver states that “each night I take my patches, blocks, and scraps of fabric from the basket by the chair; my thimble, thread, and needle comfort me” (p. 28). Then she goes on to share that “before too long. I’m breathing with the rhythm of my quilting-listening with every fiber of my soul” (p. 28) Again, the basket weaver is another character who shows the various ways that Black slaves maintained their sanity under oppression.

The painting that is paired with “Basket” portrays the calm and peace that the basket weaver found through the weaving of baskets, which “were used for gathering and storing rice and vegetables as well as cotton, shellfish, and grain” (p. 28). The painting shows her joy of basket weaving as she smiles during this activity (see Figure 27). Wood has also shared that she wanted to make another important statement with the painting.



*Figure 27. Illustration by Michele Wood from I Lay My Stitches Down.*

In a 2014 interview about the text she stated, “with ‘Basket’ I knew I wanted to use primarily red, white, and blue. I knew by that by representing the [colors] of America in the fabric [featured in the painting] that I could show this is American history, not African America history, but I say American history” (Wood, 2014). To Wood, it is important for the institution to be a part of our collective memory because it shaped the

development of the nation and its legacy continues to have influence on various aspects of life in the United States today.

### **The Horse Trainer.**

The “Rail Fence” poem also positions another unnamed slave as a victim. Again, this character serves to illustrate another way and place that enslaved Blacks found a brief respite from the rigors and hardships of slavery. Grady presents an enslaved horse trainer who finds some solace in his training and racing of horses. The poem shows the slave engaged in horse training. His moments with the horse in the stable and the track afford him “harmony within [what he calls a] fenced paradise [and] a patchwork field of freedom” (p. 24). Wood illustrates this patchwork field of freedom in a painting that features the horse trainer standing and stroking a large black horse (see Figure 28).

In representing the horse trainer, Grady and Wood not only represent another way that Blacks endured slavery but also show the diversity of experiences of the enslaved. In the historical commentary Grady adds to the illustration of these activities of Black slaves by writing that “in the early days of horse racing in the South, the horses were groomed, exercised, trained and raced by slaves” (p. 24).

By representing a horse trainer in this collection of poems about slavery, Grady and Wood are representing an experience in slavery that has rarely been taken up by writer and illustrators in world of children’s literature. Besides Alison Hart’s trilogy of young adult novels about the experience of an enslaved horse trainer and jockey Patsi Prolonger’s juvenile biography about a famous African-American jockey named Isaac Murphy who was born during the days that



*Figure 28. Illustration by Michele Wood from I Lay My Stitches Down.*

slavery was dying in 1861, the representation of this experience has been rare in children's books about the institution.

As a result of the incorporation the horse trainer into the collection, Grady and Wood, are providing readers with an opportunity to consider what life may have been like for Black slaves who primarily work in horse stables and tracks. In essence, the representation of the unnamed male slave in "Rail Fence" may lead readers to contemplate about the experience of those slaves who historians Katherine Mooney (2014) has referred to as "race horse men" in her book about how slavery and freedom were made at the race track in the United States. By featuring the character Grady and Wood represent that enslaved Black men were active in 19th-century racing, most prominent in the South, as jockeys, grooms, and trainers for this first large spectator sport in the United States. Furthermore, again through her painting, Wood signals by outfitting the horse trainer in red, white, and blue and stars, that such men should be a remembered as part of the history of horse training and racing in the early history of the sport in the United States.

### **The Runaway Slave.**

In another poem titled “Underground Railroad” the experience of yet another unnamed slave is presented. Here, the familiar narrative about the fugitive slave is again represented. The unnamed slave is positioned as a victim who is trying to resist being dominated in slavery through flight. The poem focuses on his attempt to find freedom which begins with a trip through woods that is near a river. Grady writes that the unnamed slave “uses the wind to his advantage and he listens and watches intently . . . [for] the bounty hunter [who] prowls near the riverbank” (p. 6). She continues by writing that the “hunter is no match for [him] in the woods” (p. 6). Grady concludes the poem with the unnamed slave finding success in flight. She writes that after “waiting, then [he] threads [his] way to freedom land” (p. 6).

The act of escaping slavery by flight is also represented in Wood’s painting that is paired with “Underground Railroad” (see Figure 29). In the painting Wood represents the unnamed male slave in motion with wide eyes running through the woods. In this image, other symbolic images and details related to the Black slave flight are presented: the character crossing a river, an owl sitting in a tree, the blue green sky ornamented by the North Star and the moon, and the night time and forested setting signal additional details



*Figure 29. Illustration by Michele Wood from I Lay My Stitches Down.*

about the nature of slave flight. For many it was a long journey that often involved the reading of and the challenge of nature. The historical comment that is paired with the painting and poem also adds details about the experience of the runaway slave. She writes that the act was “highly secretive, dangerous, [and] involved deception of all kinds” (p. 6).

### **The Emancipated Slave and his Reluctant Slave Owner.**

In another poem titled “North Star” which is written from the first-person point of view the experience of yet another unnamed slave is positioned as a victim who wants to be free. However, this time instead of deceptively finding his way towards freedom on the Underground Railroad, the character is freed by his master, who is positioned as a conscious resister. At the beginning of “North Star,” the domination of the unnamed slave is illustrated when he shares with the reader that “age six saw me with a new master” (p. 12).

By beginning the poem with this line, Grady is representing the troublesome nature of the domestic slave trade. Here, Grady represents what historian Wilma King (1995) referred to in her book *Stolen Childhood* as a major trauma and tragedy of the child slave experience in the United States. She writes, “whether ripped from homes in Africa or America the separation of child from a parent [in slavery] could be emotionally devastating” (p. 103) Because “young children were an integral part of the intrastate slave trade” (p. 102) the trauma and the fear of never seeing [family] again was [a] pervasive [experience in slaves’ childhood]” (p. 104). With the opening line Grady represents what King has alluded to as the most brutal and horrifying aspects of life under the

slaveholders' regime: the selling and trade of young children in slavery.

Moving forward in the narrative presented in the poem, the representation of the character's life with his new master contributes to the diverse portrayals of slavery that exists in *I Lay My Stitches Down: Poems of American Slavery*. The unnamed slave boy's new master "was no slaver" (p. 12). With this line Grady presents a picture of a White man rarely seen in contemporary children's literature. The boy's new owner is an unwilling slave owner. "Instead of [having him work in] tobacco fields, [he has him] plow the planes of Euclid. Instead of [sewing] flax, [he] spun [his] way through Homer's verse" (p. 12). Grady goes on in the historical commentary to write about Whites who, like the character in the poem, became reluctant or hesitant slave owners. She writes: "Sometimes White people, whether they were supported slavery or not, inherited slaves from their relatives. What should they do? Should they raise the children as family members? Pay them for their work? Some educated their slaves privately, so that when they were freed, they could go into the world with knowledge and skills" (p. 12). In the historical commentary, Grady is writing about how some Whites were providing them with information that could afford them social power. She is noting that some Whites were providing them with guidance that could help them to survive and access social power outside of the institution of slavery.

Grady represents the boy's new master as someone who provided him with knowledge and then set him free. In the poem the boy provides readers with details that signal that he received a classical education under his new master when he states that he "plowed [through] Euclid, spun through Homer's verse, [and] longed to hear the heavenly hymns of Pythagoras" (p. 12). After this, Grady concludes the poem by



positioning both the boy and his master as resisters of slavery. The boy shares that it “makes no difference what you know. A body wants to be free. I bade my master farewell [and] his blessings send me north, lighting my way to freedom” (p. 12). Grady represents the reluctant slave owner as someone who resists the institution by providing the boy with the foremost education and then freedom. It is a unique representation of a slave owner who does not exist in any of the other texts examined in this study.

Wood’s painting supports the poem and historical commentary by presenting an image that takes up the issue of the role that literacy may have played in the life of former slaves making their way towards or living in freedom (see Figure 30). In the painting, Wood takes up this issue. She paints a picture of the boy with two books in his hand and one at his feet. It appears that by painting a picture of the boy making his way into freedom with books represents the assertion that Grady makes in the historical commentary that is paired with the poem and painting. She writes that, “some [slaves] were educated privately so that when they were freed they could go into the world” (p. 12).



*Figure 30.* Illustration by Michele Wood from *I Lay My Stitches Down*.

By incorporating the issue of literacy in this manner, the representation of slavery that appears in “North Star” Grady and Wood take up an argument that has been made by a number of scholars about the important role that literacy played in the lives of Blacks who were in position that was similar to the boy at the end of the poem. Many free Blacks living in South during antebellum times were in a precarious situation. Due to their race they continued to live under the shadow of slavery and were vulnerable to kidnapping and being sold back into slavery. Because of their tenuous place in freedom, there had to be no doubt that they could be or were independent and productive members of society and being literate was one way to show this. For many White people literacy was linked with trying to pass or to live as a free person.

#### **The Female House Slave and her Plantation Mistress.**

In a poem titled “Broken Dishes”, readers are presented with the details about the plight of an unnamed female house slave. The young woman is positioned as a victim who is suffering under the plantation mistress who chooses to dehumanize and cruelly mistreat the girl because of her dominant position in the house and society. In the poem, the girl discloses the dehumanization experienced by a house slave. She states that the White plantation mistress is “always needling me” (p. 10) and yelling for her “to move faster and that she has a “voice is so shrill [that] it makes her] skin goose up (p. 10). The poem shows the oppression that house slaves faced under constant watchful eye of their plantation mistresses.

Wood also supports this representation with the painting that is paired with the poem. In the painting Wood depicts the unnamed female slave wearing a bib-apron and cap with an anxious look upon her face (see Figure 31). There are dishes flying from her

hands as she trips over a piano bench. This image, which is centered in the painting,



*Figure 31.* Illustration by Michele Wood from *I Lay My Stitches Down*.

renders the unnamed female slave as a character who is not in control of her circumstances. Because of the stressful nature of her work, she spills food and breaks dishes, which is an act that the character shares will cause her to be “sent into the fields” (p. 10). Grady writes in the historical commentary that sending domestic female slaves into the fields was punishment, an act of dominance, that plantation mistresses used if their “work or attitude was found unsatisfactory (p. 10).

Although the plantation mistress is only mentioned briefly in the poem, it is clear she exercises dominance within the plantation household, a microcosm of society. She dictates many the actions of the house slave who serves her and maintains a constant watchful eye over them to make sure that their temperament and work is satisfactory. The unnamed female house slave fears the plantation mistress so much that she cowers in fear and trips over a number of plates, causing them to shatter. At the end of the poem, the unnamed female house slave wonders what punishment is in store for her because of this mistake. The representation of the plantation mistress shows how they constantly watched over, controlled, and oppressed her house slaves.

In “Broken Dishes,” Grady and Wood show how plantation mistresses played an important role in maintaining the institution of slavery. In the poem, the plantation mistress is presented as someone who harshly manages her domestic slave with criticism, yelling and threats. The poem illustrates that the spouses of slave owners were primarily responsible for supervising the activities of the female slaves who engaged in plantation domestic work to insure the smooth operation of domestic life.

### **Pap the Blacksmith.**

In another poem in *I Lay My Stitches Down: Poems of American Slavery* there is another slave character who is positioned as a victim. In “Anvil” Grady represents the unique pressures that slaves who served as blacksmiths suffered as they worked under their master’s or overseer’s surveillance. Grady writes that “Pap who is a smith . . . gives the Whites the blank stare . . . [and] chants a prayer at work” (p. 20) to survive his plight as Black slave working so closely with White people. In essence, Pap is positioned as a victim who uses silence and prayer to help him to cope with his difficult circumstance as an enslaved blacksmith.

Additionally, with the representation of this slave character, again Grady presents the diverse nature of the slave experience during the antebellum period. In “Anvil” the presentation of the Pap the Blacksmith seeks to show that Black slaves existed in spaces beyond the cotton, rice, or tobacco fields. In “Anvil” Pap the blacksmith represents the notion that Black slaves had many noteworthy skills and talents that made plantations economically self-sufficient. The services of Black slave blacksmiths like Pap were all used to keep plantations running smoothly, efficiently, and with little added expense to the owners. They were extremely valuable on the plantation because they created the

instruments that fellow slaves used in the field, crated tools that were used in the household, and made weapons used for hunting and protection. Because of this blacksmiths like Pap were extremely valuable to plantation life.

A painting of Pap which accompanies “Anvil” shows him in the process of molding iron with fire, his hammer, and other tools to create an instrument that would be used on a plantation. In the painting, Wood seeks to capture the blank stare on his face that Grady writes about in the poem (see Figure 32). He is man dutifully carrying out the task that he has been charged with and silently coping with his status as a slave.



Figure 32. Illustration by Michele Wood from *I Lay My Stitches Down*.

### **The two Slave Girls Outside the Schoolhouse.**

In the poem titled “Schoolhouse”, there are also characters who reveal details about what it was like to live under slavery. Two enslaved girls are introduced who “spend the morning walking [the plantation master’s daughter] to school” (p. 17) and then have to wait patiently for her outside for some time while she receives her lessons from the teacher. These slave children are victims because they are forced to be the caretakers of their master’s daughter. In “Schoolhouse” these enslaved girl characters represent one aspect of the slave life that historians like Wilma King (1995) and Marie Jenkins Schwartz (2000) have written about in their studies about the slaves' experiences

from infancy through adolescence. According to Swartz (2000), “all members of the [master’s] White family, as well the overseer and his wife, enjoyed personal services performed by slave children. Additionally, girls usually waited on women and their daughters and took care of boys of the men and their sons” (p. 92). As Grady illustrates in “Schoolhouse” one of these personal services that Black slave children performed was accompanying and attending to the needs of White children on the plantation. The representation shows the power and control that masters had over slaves from a very early age.

However, although the slave girl characters are positioned as victims at the beginning of the poem because they are forced to carry out a personal service for the master’s daughter, as the poem progresses Grady demonstrates how slaves attempted to resist the control that they faced on a daily basis. Through “Schoolhouse” Grady describes an example of the type of covert resistance that Black slaves enacted often. In the historical commentary, Grady notes that during slavery times “slaves were forbidden to read and write” (p. 17) and points out that if they were caught trying to learn either language mode they would be severely punished. She then demonstrates that despite the threat of punishment, some slaves, like the girls in the poem, tried to learn to read or write whenever the opportunity presented itself.

Grady writes that while the two slave girls waited for the master’s daughter outside the school they would “steal away beneath the oak [near the schoolhouse] to piece together everything they could hear” (p. 17). Then she ends the poem by noting that the learning that the girls acquired outside the plantation schoolhouse “gave them hope” (p. 17). Wood illustrates the learning that Grady writes about with a painting that depicts the

two young girls sitting beneath an oak outside the schoolhouse and writing the beginning of the alphabet on the dusty ground (see Figure 33). The painting also contains the images of three famous black escaped slaves who became abolitionists like Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, and Henry Box Brown who challenged slavery through their writing. Readers have to pay close attention to the images to see them because they are blended into the outside wall of the schoolhouse and represented behind the two young



Figure 33. Illustration by Michele Wood from *I Lay My Stitches Down*.

slave girls. Grady and Wood’s work asserts that the acquisition of literacy was sought by and important to enslaved Blacks.

### **Unnamed Beaten Slave.**

In another poem titled the “Tree of Life”, the punishment that slaves faced for challenging this system is displayed as details about the beating of another unnamed slave at a lashing tree is represented. In the poem the unnamed slave is represented “crying [and] drinking his tears” (p. 15) because he has been beaten badly [and] “left tied to a tree” (p. 16). The beating is so severe that it leaves “a patchwork of cuts” (p. 16) across his back, which is illustrated in the darkly rendered painting that is paired with the poem (see Figure 34). The unnamed slave’s eyes are practically closed, which shows just

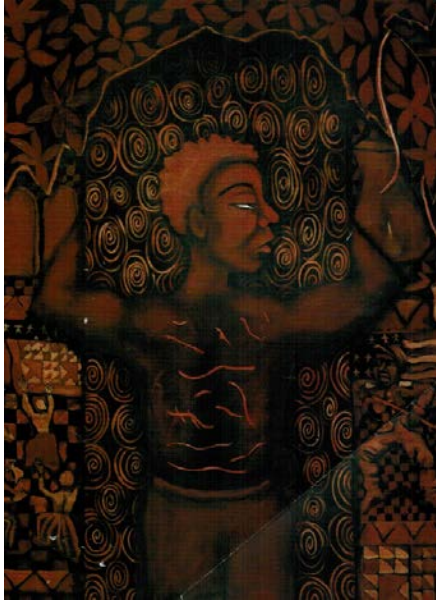


Figure 34. Illustration by Michele Wood from *I Lay My Stitches Down*.

how much pain he endures as a result of the beating. Grady notes in the historical commentary that beatings were the most common form of punishment for slaves. She writes that it “could be carried out for a range of offenses, such as failing to work hard enough, stealing, or trying to run away” (p. 16).

Again, Grady positions the unnamed slaves as a victim suffering and stuck in the harsh, violent, and oppressive system of slavery. However, Grady also presents the slave character as someone with great strength. Although he has been beaten badly, at the end of the poem, he manages to soothe himself “with a song that stirs in his soul, [it is] a righteous melody that takes root where [he] weeps” (p. 16).

### **Enslaved Mother and Daughter.**

In the poem “Wagon Wheel” there are more enslaved characters who are depicted as victims. A White overseer colludes with the slave system by separating a young girl from her mother. Grady allows the mother to describe how the horrible act takes place. She writes: “when [the overseer] comes to the cabins, Lord have mercy, a wagon load of



sadness ain't far behind; someone about to be sold. This morning he come for my baby girl - she done reach her breeding age. [She will] fetch a good price" (p. 22). The pain the mother experiences because of the act of domination is represented at the end of the poem as Grady writes "her mama moaning low, drag my heart clean out of my chest, leaving only grief" (p. 22). The agony and grief of mother and daughter are also rendered in the painting that accompanies the poem (see Figure 35).



Figure 35. Illustration by Michele Wood from *I Lay my Stitches Down*.

The mother's head is tossed back and her hands are flailing in the air on one side of the painting. On the other side, her daughter's hands are outstretched reaching towards her mother as the overseer drags her away from the slave cabins. In the poem and the painting Grady and Wood represent another cruel facet of slavery. Because of their status virtually no slave family in the slave South was completely safeguarded from forced separation. Grady also adds more details about the selling of slaves in the historical commentary. She notes "slaveholders sold their slaves for many reasons: to pay off debts, to increase wealth, and sometimes to punish a slave. Healthy strong men and women of childbearing age brought the highest prices. Keeping families together was not important

to slave owners. [There were] many slaves [who] lost their family members to [slave] auctions” (p. 22).

### **Slave Hunter.**

Similar to the slave tracker in *Freedom’s a-Callin me* there is a slave hunter character who exists in a poem in *I Lay My Stitches Down: Poems of American Slavery* who is positioned from a place of dominance. In the poem “Underground Railroad”, the slave hunter is represented as a White person who directly benefits from the institution so he works to secure Blacks in slavery. Grady renders the character as someone who is a “slave to greed” (p. 5) and makes his living by hunting runaway slaves and returning them to slavery. His ability to return Blacks to slavery helps him to stay in place of dominance where Whites financially benefit from the unpaid work and oppression of Blacks. However, in “Underground Railroad” he is not successful at returning a runaway to slavery because he is “no match for this [escaped slave] in the woods” (p. 5).

In “Underground Railroad” Grady incorporates the slave hunter character to show that the relationship between master and slave was not the only nexus of violence and control. Slave hunters and patrols played an important role in legitimizing and using violence against slaves. Control of and violence against Black slaves was not confined simply to slave masters; other Whites carried out both against the enslaved because of the benefits that they gained because of the existence of the institution.

### **Overseer.**

In the poem “Wagon Wheel,” another White character is rendered as a colluder with the system. The overseer carries out a number of acts of domination against the Black slaves on the plantation and is viewed by them as someone who is “cut from the

same cloth as the devil himself” (p. 22). The enslaved mother character in the poem also notes that when he “comes to the cabins, Lord have mercy, a wagonload of sadness ain’t far behind” (p. 22). The overseer’s position of colluder with the system is also explicitly on display when he removes a young girl away from her mother because she has reached breeding age. The illustration that accompanies the poem shows the mother in agony and pain, as the overseer drags the girl from her mother (see Figure 35). The mother screams and cries uncontrollably, and then walks away. Similar to the slave hunter, Grady and Wood include this character in the collection of poems about slavery to show that other Whites played a role in maintaining the institution of slavery.

### **Teacher.**

A White female teacher appears in the poem “Schoolhouse”. She is charged with teaching the plantation master’s children. She exercises collaborative power as she works secretly to help young Black slaves learn to read and write. When a few enslaved slave girls “steal beneath an oak tree near her plantation school house to piece together [everything] they hear” (p. 17), the teacher recognizes this, but she does not report them. Instead, she makes sure “she teaches her lessons loud and clear” (p. 17) so that they can hear her. Her act of allowing the young slaves to listen to her lessons was a dangerous one for all involved, but recognizing that learning what she was teaching “gave them hope” (p. 17). She assisted the slave girls through small acts of resistance by not reporting them and making sure they could hear her voice.

### **A Critical Examination of Gender, Race, and Class**

Black women are represented prevalently throughout *I Lay My Stitches Down: Poems of American Slavery*. In fact, more Black female characters appear in this book

that in any of the other neo-slave narratives featured in this study. They are central characters in nine of the fourteen poems featured in the collection. There are illustrations of Black women in ten of the fourteen paintings that appear in the text. While two of these female characters (the contemporary archeologists of color) exercise collaborative power, all the other Black female characters in the text are positioned as victims.

Grady and Wood's decision to weave so many Black female characters into the text seems deliberate, like an attempt to present the unique position that women were in under slavery because of their gender. In fact, Wood has shared that through her work in *I Lay My Stitches Down: Poems of American Slavery* she wanted the "female characters to give their testimony or testify" [about their experiences in slavery] (Wood, 2014).

The representation of the enslaved Black female characters in the text primarily focuses on the oppression that they faced. The emphasis is upon the ways they experienced the harshness of slavery. Interestingly, the Black female enslaved characters featured in *I Lay My Stitches Down* do not move across the power continuum in the same way that the primary Black female characters in *Sojourner Truth's Step-Stomp Stride*, *Moses*, and *Freedom's a-Callin me* do. Moreover, the popular theme of escape is not included in their narratives. Conversely, there is a focus on how they survived experiences that were unique to Black women living under slavery.

For instance, in the poem "Wagon Wheel", Grady genders the representation of slavery when she alludes to the slave breeding during the antebellum period. In the poem, when she writes that overseer has come to take away her baby girl because she has "done reach her breeding age" (p. 22), she is making readers aware of the sexual abuse of female slaves that was a common occurrence in the U.S. antebellum south because of

slave breeding and the difficult nature of slave motherhood. During the antebellum period slave breeding involved coerced sexual relations between male and female slaves, sexual relations between master and slave with the intention to produce slave children, and favoring female slaves who produced a relatively large number of children. Because of slave breeding, young girls like the one represented in “Wagon Wheel” were often valued because their ability to produce the slave population. This was particularly important after the 1808 federal ban on the importation of slaves into the United States. Consequently, Grady writes a narrative that represents the precarious position of young enslaved women because of their gender.

The difficult and uncertain plight of slave mothers is also represented in the poem. By representing a baby being taken away from her mother in “Wagon Wheel” Grady and Wood are showing one harsh and cruel facet of life as slave mother. Because slave women, and their children were considered stock mothers in bondage they had no legal right to keep children. Because of this, as O’Reilly (2004) writes in *A Politics of the Heart*, “slavery ruptured the mother line by forcibly separating mothers from [their children]” (p. 45) *I Lay My Stitches Down: Poems of American Slavery* shows that for slave women in the American South, motherhood was no simple joy; it was an experience of inconceivable ambivalence. On the plantation, enslaved women had little say in whether, when and how they would become mothers. Some were impregnated by their owners and some raised their owner's children, forced to lavish time and care on the master's babies rather than their own.

Grady and Wood also gendered the slave experience in their text by focusing on the division of labor that existed regarding specific work tasks in some of the poems. In

“Broken Dishes” Grady presents a narrative that features the unique oppression that enslaved female domestic servants faced under plantation mistresses. The poems also represent the plantation household as a space occupied by primarily women. They show that women were responsible for the work that was done within the plantation household. In “Broken Dishes” Grady make it clear that as household slaves, it was Black women who were primarily responsible for housewifery tasks.

In “Bird in the Air” ‘readers are presented again with the image of the Black enslaved woman as the individual responsible for the upkeep and care of the plantation household. Grady shows a female character responsible for preparing food for their masters in the Big House and the slaves in the cabins. In “School House” the unique responsibility of young slave girls had to take care of the young children in the plantation household is represented. Then, in “Basket” and “Cotton Boll”, “Grady presents narratives that show the work that enslaved Black women did as spinners, weavers, and seamstresses. Through the narratives found in *I Lay My Stitches Down: Poems of American Slavery* the unique position of Black women living under slavery is explored and rendered.

While woman are centered in the majority of the narratives found in *I Lay My Stitches Down: Poems of American Slavery*, Black men and White men and women are also present. In some of the poem narratives that focus on work tasks that were specific to enslaved Black men is represented. First, in “Anvil”, Grady and Wood recount the experiences of enslaved Black men who worked as blacksmiths by presenting a narrative about old Pap. Then later, in “Rail Fence” they represent the Black male-dominated work of horse rearing and racing. Like their female character counterparts, all the enslaved

Black men in the text are also positioned as victims struggling to survive under slavery; however, there are two who exercise power across the power continuum because they resist and take action against the institution through flight. In “Underground Railroad” and “North Star”, Grady and Wood introduce the common theme of resistance of the Black men through flight.

Three White male characters are also presented in *I Lay My Stitches Down: Poems of American Slavery*. Two are represented in a manner that is similar to many of the White male characters in that appear in the other books featured in this study and another who is distinct. In fact, there are no other characters that are similarly rendered in the narratives examined in this study. In “Wagon Wheel”, the White male overseer character is represented in a way that is common in the neo-slave narratives analyzed in this study. In the poem the overseer is in a place of dominance and collusion and serves to illustrate the ways the Whites oppressed Black slaves under slavery. Like the male overseer character the slave hunter character in “Underground Railroad” represents a role that some non-slave owning White males played in maintaining the institution of slavery. In contrast to the overseer and the hunter, another White character, a reluctant slave owner is also presented as an individual who helps Blacks to resist the institution of slavery. As noted earlier in the poem “North Star”, this White character is not interested in maintaining slavery. Instead, he works against it by ignoring the law and not hindering his slave from becoming literate and then setting him free. The representation of the three White male characters seeks to show that the experience of White men slavery was not monolithic.

Grady also presents two White women characters in a similar manner. While one

supports slavery, the other works to help Blacks resist it. In ‘Broken Dishes’ Grady and Wood introduce a plantation mistress character who is positioned from a place of dominance which is illustrated through her control of the social condition of a domestic Black female slave. In the poem, Grady supports the assertion that rich White women who owned plantations also played a significant role in oppressing Black slaves. To illustrate this, in “Broken Dishes” Grady represents the plantation mistress carrying out a number of acts of oppression against her Black female house slave. However, there is also the representation of a White woman as a resister and collaborator in the poem “School House.” In the poetic narrative, unlike the White plantation mistress, this White teacher takes action through micro-moments to help enslaved Black girls.

Overall, when it comes to gender, although Black men and White males and females are presented, *I Lay My Stitches Down: Poems of American Slavery* is primarily foregrounding the experiences of Black women living under slavery. In doing this work, the text is contributing to fictional accounts that have gendered the slave experience so that contemporary readers can recognize the unique power relations that Black women faced under the institution. The text places the Black female experience at the center of its narratives about slavery.

*I Lay My Stitches Down: Poems of American Slavery* also represents a wide array of narratives about the experience of Blacks who lived under slavery. While the familiar theme of discontented slaves who attempted to escape slavery through flight can be found in the text, it also features a number of narratives that focus on how Blacks managed to survive this oppression. Here, not all the stories about enslaved Blacks follow the popular trajectory of enslavement to escape to freedom. Instead, most of the representations of



enslaved Blacks in the text focus on their attempts to cope with their dehumanizing experiences and living conditions. In the text, there are only few hopeful conclusions presented about the life trajectory of the enslaved Black characters.

While all the other picture books in this study primarily feature escape from slavery, *I Lay My Stitches Down: Poems of American Slavery* disrupts the common happy conclusion of successful escape of enslaved Blacks by depicting Black slave characters who remained in slavery without much hope for escape. While most of the characters in the text manage to remain hopeful by engaging in small activities that uplifted their spirits in the short time that they had to call their own, the overall thrust of text is one that centers on various ways that Blacks suffered under and endured slavery. The representation of the race-based domination is stitched throughout all poems in the book.

Throughout the text what is clear is that Gray and Wood are attempting to represent the cruel nature of the race-based institution of slavery that existed in the United States. In *I Lay My Stitches Down: Poems*, the oppressive conditions of slavery that were maintained by most Whites are foregrounded. Through paintings and poems readers are presented with details about harsh working conditions, slave beatings, and separation of families. These representations challenge the assertion that Black slaves were treated well under slavery.

*I Lay My Stitches Down: Poems of American Slavery* also builds upon the representation of the harsh nature of slavery through the construction of a White character. In “Wagon Wheel”, Grady constructs a White overseer character as cold and callous man who has no concern for Black slaves. Grady writes “the overseer was cut from the same cloth as the devil himself” (p. 22). He “came for [the slave woman’s] baby

girl in her cabin [and dragged her away despite her] moaning” (p. 22). Although the act of taking a child away from her mother is not the same type of violence as a beating or stomping, Grady and Wood represent what historian Jacqueline Jones (2009) refers to as one of the most violent acts during slavery times. The rendering of the removal of a slave child from their parent through words and images in *I Lay My Stitches Down: Poems of American Slavery* is another example of how this poetry and painting collection portrays the cruelty of White supporters of slavery.

However, it is important to note that the text also seeks to show the strength of enslaved Blacks. Although the Black characters are coping with the cruel and oppressive conditions of slavery, they are not constructed as helpless or hopeless. Instead, their covert resistance, the small acts that they carry out to uplift their spirits and the illustrations present them as strong individuals who are survivors. In fact, Wood has shared that with her paintings “she tried to give the [Blacks who are illustrated living in slavery] dignity versus depicting them very sorrowful or depressed. I wanted to give them more dignity because I know they had it and [too often] it was taken away from them” (Wood, 2014)

### **Production Practices of *January’s Sparrow***

*January’s Sparrow* written and illustrated by Patricia Polacco has been well received and recognized by many reviewers as a picture book that can be a meaningful addition classroom and school libraries. Elizabeth Bush (2010) has written that the text, with its detailed focus on slavery, can be a useful compliment to the materials already available about the plantation life, treatment of slaves, and the Underground Railroad. Jacquie Skurla (2010) has also noted that the book can be a meaningful addition to school

libraries when teaching early American History. Skurla writes that Polacco, who always does an excellent job of delving into issues of injustice in her children's texts, is again successful in presenting a tale about the horrors and triumphs of history. She also adds that the text would be a meaningful addition to school libraries when teaching United States history.

Polacco has written and illustrated more than 90 picture books. She is recognized as a gifted master storyteller in the world of children's literature and has won numerous awards for her work. Polacco, known for her knack of transforming intimate family stories into tales with broader meaning and appeal (Bush, 2010), has represented the experiences of families living through various historical events. She has written about the relationship between Native Americans and colonists, Nazi occupation of France, Germany occupation of Italy during World War II, and the Civil War in the United States. The "stories that raise consciousness . . . [and] respect and embrace diversity are [also] a hallmark of Patricia Polacco's books" (Giles, 1998 p. 150). According to Polacco, her interest in representing diverse narratives in her books is partly due to her upbringing. Growing up in Oakland, California enabled Polacco to experience a multicultural community. As she states, "there were different colors, ideas, and values which caused [her] to develop a deep respect for the ways of others think that are different than her own" (Giles, 1998, p. 150).

Because of this deep respect for diversity Polacco does intensive research when creating stories about people of color and multicultural communities. In fact, a number of reviewers have acknowledged and applauded the in-depth research that Polacco did for *January's Sparrow*. Patricia Tilton (2013) has noted that clearly Polacco "did a lot of

research for the book [and that] adds considerably to the story's authenticity" (p. 33 ).

Ann Ackerman, Patrica Howson, and Betty Mulberry (2013) have also featured *January's Sparrow* in an article about authenticity and children's picture books about history. The text was featured because Polacco drew on WPA slave narratives, historians, and numerous secondary sources about slavery to create *January's Sparrow*.

*January's Sparrow* is composed of 96 pages in a unique picture-book format.

There are 44 detailed illustrations that take up a page and a half that are paired with text throughout the book. The book has been classified as an upper elementary to high school text and has won a number of awards. The book won the Bank Street College of Education for 2010 and the Best Children's Book of the Year Award, International Reading Association Teaching Choice Award, and Smithsonian Notable Children's Book Award in 2009. The book includes a prologue at the beginning and note about dialogue and research that is presented at the end.

### **Summary of *January's Sparrow***

Told from the viewpoint of a character named January, a young man who was born into slavery, this picture book is based on true events that took place in Marshall, Michigan, near where the Patricia Polacco lives today. The narrative begins with the shockingly brutal beating of a runaway slave on a Kentucky plantation. At the beginning of the story the Crosswhite family watches while January is whipped and almost kicked to death for trying to escape to freedom. After this, the family members run away that night, bound for Canada. Polacco represents the family's fear and fortitude as they follow the North Star, walking through cornfields, climbing high bluffs, and making their way through muck and mud. On their way towards Canada, they take refuge in Marshall,

Michigan, a sanctuary on the Underground Railroad, where they remain until slave hunters track them down. After a confrontation in which the town rallies behind them, the Crosswhites continue on their way to Canada, accompanied by January, who has shown up unexpectedly. Polacco's dynamic and sometimes brutal pictures, rendered in pencil and markers, support the text in representing the Crosswhite's quest out of slavery towards freedom.

In representing the story of the Crosswhite family in *January's Sparrow*, Patricia Polacco also draws on slave narratives. In an attempt to capture the voices of the Crosswhite family, Polacco read numerous WPA slave narratives and viewed the HBO documentary *Unchained Memories: Reading from the Slave Narratives* to learn about slavery first hand from those who experienced it and to attempt to mirror the dialect that the family probably used in her telling of the Crosswhite's journey from slavery to freedom. The ending of *January's Sparrow* is closed to interpretation, as it clearly shows that the Crosswhite family managed to stay in freedom up to the point of the Civil War. Then, on the final pages of the text, Polacco writes that, "After the Civil War the Crosswhites returned to Marshall [where] they lived their lives both there and in the nearby Battle Creek in freedom and peace" (p. 94). In the final illustration, the main character, Sadie, who is now much older, sits quietly in front of a fireplace.

### **Exercise of Power Among Characters**

*January's Sparrow* is narrated from a mixture of first-person and third-person point of view. Throughout the story the narrator, a character named January provides details about what all the characters think, feel, do, and witness. However, *January's Sparrow* is told using primarily from third-person perspective. Throughout most of the story the

narrator January recounts the actions of a large cast of characters. In essence, the story is told primarily from January's perspective.

**Sadie Crosswhite.**

Sadie Crosswhite is positioned as a victim at the beginning of the text. It is from her viewpoint that readers are presented with the brutal nature of the institution that she is forced to live under as she witnesses the savage beating of slave who attempted to run away. In the beginning scene of *January's Sparrow*, the helplessness of Sadie and the other slaves on the plantation is portrayed. As the paddy rollers (overseers) drag the runaway slave on a rope that is tied to their horses, "all the slaves have been ordered to stand at the porch rail that morning" (p. 6) to witness his punishment. Throughout this scene readers are presented with the lack of power that the Sadie feels she has over her current situation. Although she would love to help the runaway slave, January, who she views as her foster brother, she cannot because of her position on the plantation. She knows that attempting to help him could bring her much harm or even death. Recognizing this, she watches in agony as January is beaten and stomped to the verge of death. She "almost falls to her knees when she sees who they [are] dragging" (p. 8).

Polacco visually represents Sadie's anguish, fear, sadness, and terror with the painting is coupled with this part of the narrative. In the illustration Sadie is shown with clenched hands, wide eyes, and an open mouth (see Figure 36). Sadie's sadness and pain continue

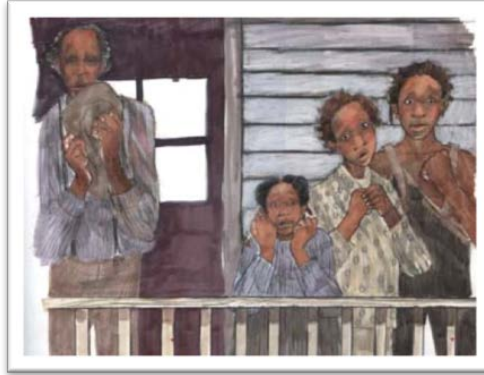


Figure 36. Illustration by Patricia Polacco from *January's Sparrow*.

to be illustrated by Polacco as the opening scene progresses. After January is punished and to her knowledge buried, because her father Adam arrives at their quarters “carrying a shovel [and] his clothes covered in mud “cause he had been digging” a grave, Sadie “burst into tears” (p. 15) and then “cried herself to sleep” (p. 16).

At this point in the story, Polacco represents that in this system of slavery Sadie is positioned as helpless, unable to help her foster brother in a dire and deadly situation. For Polacco, the opening scene illustrates how the public display of punishment for disobedience and resistance was one tool that slave owners and their supporters used to maintain their power, dominance, and control over slaves.

However, *January's Sparrow* shows that this tool was not always effective in controlling all slaves and keeping them in their place on a plantation. In the next part of the story's arc, although Sadie and her family have witnessed the brutal beating of January for running away, they are not discouraged from attempting to control their own social condition as they attempt a flight towards freedom. Similar to a number of the slave characters written about in other children's books examined in this study Sadie resists her victimization in slavery through flight. In Sadie's case, she is helped by her family and a number of White and Black resisters along the way who help her to get to

and remain in freedom.

While making her way towards freedom, Polacco uses Sadie to illustrate the fear that runaway slaves felt in flight and the trauma that they might have endured from their experience in slavery after their escape. As Sadie and her family make their way towards freedom in Canada, on a number of occasions Polacco represents her dread and dismay about her status halfway between slavery and freedom. First, as they escape from the plantation through the woods “Sadie’s heart beat[s] so hard she hear[s] it” (p.20). Then, as they are taken across a river from Kentucky to Indiana in a rowboat by a woman working on the Underground Railroad, she “begins to cry [because she] knew that none of them could swim” (p. 22). After this, when they are sheltered in a barn that is owned by another ally on the Underground Railroad, Sadie “soon [falls] asleep, [but] call[s] for her momma many times [because] she [has] terrible nightmares about bein’ caught watching [the overseer] Lee and Ford beat her brothers and her momma and daddy” (p. 29).

As the story progresses Polacco makes clear that despite her family flight, Sadie is still plagued by trauma from her slave past. Despite the resistance through escape, her status as a victim continues because of the oppression that she suffered under as a slave child. As they make their way from farm to house along the Underground Railroad, “Sadie’s nightmares seemed to be gettin’ worse and worse” (p. 30). Even when Sadie’s family arrives in a town that hides escaped slavery and are supported and protected by a number of interracial allies for some time she is still haunted by her past and her place halfway between slavery and freedom. Although she “wasn’t having her nightmares as often” (p 48), they still plagued her at times.



When another character comes to the Crosswhite's house to tell them that there is a "stranger in town and that everybody was watching him" (p. 51) to make sure they are not after them, Sadie worries and has "a nightmare that was worst than any of the others" (p. 51). After this, Sadie even has a panic attack while she is at animal auction with a White friend named Polly because it reminds her of times that she saw "White folks . . . pull babies out of their mamma's arms [so that they could be] sold off" (p. 58).

Sadie's remembering of this practice is also illustrated in a powerful painting that shows Sadie with a horrified look upon her face and almost an image of a slave auction, done in Black and White to show that it is from the past, juxtaposed above her head. It is only in the ending sequence that takes place over a few days and shows Sadie and her family making their way to Canada that Sadie's trauma and fear is not illustrated.

The story closes with an illustration of Sadie in her old age, remembering her past and sharing some of it with her son. In the end, it appears that Polacco is illustrating that even though there were Blacks who resisted slavery through flight, the oppression that they faced while living as slaves was hard to shake from their memory. Even through escape and in freedom understandably slavery continued to be on Sadie's mind.

### **Ben, Cyrus, and John.**

Similar to Sadie, her siblings are positioned as victims at the beginning of the text and then resist the system of domination that they live under through flight. Throughout the story they too are a part of a family that resists slavery through flight. Additionally, like Sadie Polacco uses Ben, Cyrus, and John to illustrate the fears that young Black slaves suffered while they lived under slavery or when they resisted it.

For example, in the beginning of the story, while witnessing the beating of January,

Ben “could hardly stand [and] his knees kept giving out with each stroke of the whip” (p. 10). Then, while they were being transported in a boat from Kentucky to Indiana “Ben and Cyrus [also] begin to cry” (p. 22). After this, Cyrus worries that if slave hunting “dogs get [their] scent, they will be done for” (p.30). Throughout the text, the characterization of Ben, Cyrus and John mirrors the one the Polacco has put forth for Sadie. However, because they featured much less in the story they appear in less micro-interactions that illustrate the oppression that young Black slaves suffered under slavery.

#### **Adam and Sarah Crosswhite.**

Sarah is Sadie’s mom and Adam is her father. Similar to Sarah both are positioned as victims who attempt to resist their status and condition as slaves by escaping their master’s plantation to find freedom. Both of them play crucial roles in shepherding their family in the escape from the plantation to Marshall, Michigan and then freedom in Canada. However, in this narrative of escape it is Adam who is characterized as the knowledgeable, savvy, supportive leader of the family. Polacco makes it clear that Adam is instrumental in guiding his family through the journey from slavery to freedom. In essence, he leads his family’s resistance against slavery.

Polacco develops the characterization of Adam as leader on a number of occasions throughout the story’s arc. For instance, as they prepare to escape it is Adam who tells his family about specifics of the plan to make their way off the plantation. “Now all of you stay close to me [because] Thaddeus Quill is comin’ to take us to the boat” (p. 18). Then, it is Adam who knows about the girl (the boat lifter) who will take them by rowboat from Kentucky to Indiana. Polacco’s narrator relates that “Adam knew about the boat lifters. He knew not to call Sarah and his children by name, so if paddy rollers took to beatin’ the

girl, she couldn't tell em' names she never heard. He also knew she wouldn't look at any of their faces so's she could tell em' about the faces she done never seen" (p. 22).

Later, in their initial journey towards freedom, again it is Adam's knowledge that guides his family: "They traveled at night so as not to be seen [and it is] Adam [who] watched who watched the North Star and followed it to the next safe farm or house on what everybody called the Underground Railroad" (p. 30). After the family has arrived in the town that hides runaways, readers learn that it is Adam who learned about the place from his friend Moses Patterson.

While in the town, Polacco also illustrates Adam's leadership and savvy nature with a number of other acts. He lets his family know that, although they will hide out in Marshall, Michigan, for a time, they will still continue on to "Canada [because it] is the only place they will be safe" (p. 37). During their time in Marshall, Adam finds a job at a mercantile store to support his family and then when trouble comes with the arrival of paddy rollers, he gathers his family down and lets them know that "he has a plan" (p. 55) to keep them safe. In one illustration that accompanies this part of the story, Polacco places Adam at the center of his family and all eyes are upon him as he prepares to tell them what they will need to do next (see Figure 37).



*Figure 37.* Illustration by Patricia Polacco from *January's Sparrow*.

At the end of the story Polacco also illustrates Adam's savvy nature and leadership when January, who everyone assumes was dead, rejoins the family. January shares that "back in Kentucky when I was beat so bad and left staked out for dead-that night, [it was] Adam [who] came for me. He carried me himself into the woods and hid me . . . he dug my grave all right, but he put nothin' but field rocks in it. He marked it so the master and paddy rollers would never look for me again" (p. 88). This act shows that as a leader Adam used trickery to help January survive. For Polacco, the act also shows how some slaves were willing to take risks to help others remain alive under slavery. On a whole, Adam is at the forefront of his family's survival in and resistance against slavery.

Sarah Crosswhite also helps her family to survive in slavery. While she is not cast as a leader like Adam, she offers a great deal of support to help her family resist slavery. Polacco includes a number of micro-interactions in the story that illustrates Sarah supporting her family in their resistance of slavery. For instance, it is Sarah who wakes the children up on the first night of the escape and "gets them dress[ed] and pack[ed]" (p. 18). She also helps lead them away from the plantation and comforts them when they express their fears about being caught. When fear grips Sadie so much that she sobs and asks "why are we leavin' [now] anyway?" (p. 20). Sarah takes "Sadie's face in her hands" (p. 20) and tells her that "they was coming to fetch the boy in the mornin'. We heard it ourselves. They was gonna be auctioned off [and] ain't nobody takin' my babies" (p. 20). In the story, these words to comfort Sadie because they show that her mother is willing to do whatever it takes to make sure the family stays together. They also illustrate that some Blacks were willing to resist slavery to keep their families together. When the family arrives in Marshall, Michigan, halfway between slavery and freedom, Sarah

supports her family in resistance continues. She handles all the domestic responsibilities, works cleaning houses and washing clothes to get money for the family, and constantly comforts Sadie when she has nightmares about being captured by slave catchers.

Sarah's resistance to slavery is also palpable in the naming of her new baby, which she gives birth to while they are in Marshall. Not only does Sarah stress the importance of her being able to name her own child instead of her master, but she also chooses a name that she believes will help her children to continue to resist the psychological oppression of slavery. When Sarah shares that she is going to name the baby Frances, which is the name of their former slave owner, her children "look at each other in shock" (p. 51). However, Sarah notes that she is doing this so that "none of them will never fear that name again [and that] her name will stand for freedom from [that man]" (p. 51). Sarah is a character who exercises power across the continuum in *January's Sparrow*. She moves from victim to a resister who is helping her family deal with the oppression of slavery during the antebellum period.

### **January Drumm.**

At the beginning of the story January, Adam and Sarah Crosswhite's foster son, is introduced in a fashion that clearly and shockingly positions him as a victim. In the opening scene of the book January is whipped and kicked for trying to escape to freedom. In this brutal scene, which opens the book and lasts eleven pages, words and images portray the dehumanization and victimization faced for attempting to run away. The scene begins on title page with an image of January's bloodied wrists, which are bounded by a rope (see Figure 38) and continues with an illustration that spans four.



*Figure 38. Illustration by Patricia Polacco from January's Sparrow.*

pages that shows him, bloodied and eyes turned upwards, being dragged by paddy rollers (see Figures 39 and 40). After the dragging is represented, there are additional pages that contain illustrations that show the stunned and horrified faces of slaves on the plantation who witness January dragged back into the plantation (see Figure 41).



*Figure 39. Illustration by Patricia Polacco from January's Sparrow.*



*Figure 40. Illustration by Patricia Polacco from January's Sparrow.*

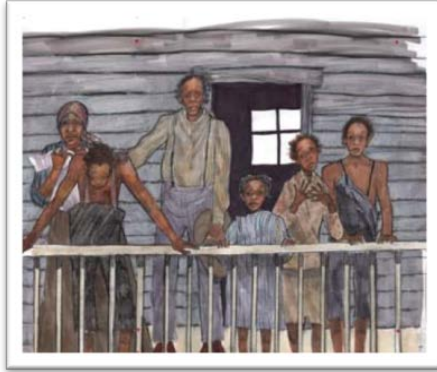


Figure 41. Illustration by Patricia Polacco from *January's Sparrow*.

Then readers observe through a full-page illustration the stomping of January by the paddy rollers (see Figure 42). In the illustration that portrays this violence, January's bloodied body is staked to the ground, his back is scarred, and the paddy rollers are stomping upon him with their boots. In this opening scene, January is victimized by the slave system.



Figure 42. Illustration by Patricia Polacco from *January's Sparrow*.

However, Polacco also uses January to illustrate the strength and the courage that some Blacks had in the face such victimization. Despite being brutally beaten Polacco's narrator relates that the overseers "couldn't make January holler" (p. 10). She also writes that though his "skin jerked, quaked, and [that he] twisted and puked up . . . he never cried out" (p. 10). January's strength is also rendered when he unexpectedly returns to his

foster family in Marshall, Michigan. In the scene of his return, Polacco presents a graphic illustration that shows January with his scarred back and arms raised to show that even the brutal beating at the beginning of the story could not keep him away from his family or freedom (see Figure 43). She also writes that they “all stood in silence” (p. 80) as they looked upon the man whom most assumed was dead. After his return, January continues to resist slavery through flight as the Crosswhite family decides that, “now that January was alive, [they] would all have to set out to Canada” (p. 84).



Figure 43. Illustration by Patricia Polacco from *January's Sparrow*.

#### **Ford and Lee Troutman, the Paddy Rollers (Overseers).**

Ford and Lee, who work as overseers for Master Giltner, are positioned as dominant in *January Sparrow* because they help maintain the institution of slavery. They collaborate with the Master Giltner to keep Black slaves oppressed. In the opening scene of the book, their violent practices are showcased to serve as an example of the dehumanizing acts that maintained the institution of slavery. At the beginning of the picture book, Ford and Lee savagely whip, beat, and stomp January to punish him for trying to escape. The punishment, which takes place in front of all the slaves on the plantation, also serves as an example to others of what could happen to them if they too would attempt to escape. Ford and Lee's actions reveal the unequal position of slaves and



those who maintained and supported the institution through dehumanization of slaves. Ford and Lee's brutal beating of January include much cruelty, which includes celebrating, taunting, and the rubbing of salt and pepper into January's open back which is a result of his severe beating.

After the beating, Ford and Lee continue their work to keep slaves on the plantation in their hunt for the Crosswhite family who escape and attempt to find their way into free land. On the night of their escape Ford and Lee set out on their hunt for the family with bloodhounds. This is vividly represented in three quarter page illustration that shows Lee, Ford, and another White man wearing all Black a top horses holding their bloodhounds in front of them. Two of the bloodhounds are at the front of the image with their sharp teeth bared and the men have frowns upon their faces (see Figure 44). The image provides a visual that speaks to why the Crosswhite children continue to live in fear while their family is resisting slavery through flight.



Figure 44. Illustration by Patricia Polacco from *January's Sparrow*.

Although Ford and Lee come close to capturing the Crosswhites on the night of their escape, the family escapes because they are assisted by other resisters of slavery who work on the Underground Railroad. However, Ford and Lee are not deterred in their attempt to drag the family back into bondage. Later in the story, their hunt for the

Crosswhite family is again featured when they arrive in Marshall, Michigan. They come close to recapturing the family when they arrive at their home, but their efforts are again thwarted by a number of resisters from Marshall. Although they are thwarted and are not able to return the Crosswhites to slavery, in *January's Sparrow* Lee and Ford serve serves as symbols for those individuals who worked tirelessly to maintain the institution of slavery.

**Master Frances Giltner.**

Similar to other slave masters that appear in the books featured in this study Master Giltner is positioned in a place of domination where he knowingly dehumanizes and victimizes Black men and women because they are his property. He is at the top of a system based on oppression and works to maintain it with his actions. His position is presented at the beginning of the text as Sadie notes that all the slaves “feared the same thing on the plantation: Master Frances Giltner” (p. 6). Master Giltner represents the extent of his power over his slaves when the overseers beat and stomp January to the verge of death in front of the other slaves. After the beating, Master Giltner stands over the runaway slave and says: “I want you all to see what happens to any brown-skinned devil that runs away from me!” (p. 10). With the power to decide whether January will live or die, his domination of his slaves is evident.

Master Giltner’s power is inherent to the slave system because he sends his overseers after the Crosswhites, who he considers as his property, to return them to his plantation. Master Giltner has a lot of power. He has the power to buy Black slaves and to employ White men who help him keep them enslaved. In characterizing Master Giltner in this way, Polacco is taking up class matters in the story as well. Master Giltner shows

that it was wealthy white men who were at the apex of the slave system and determined a great deal about the lives of others.

### **The Black Girl in the Boat.**

The Black girl in the boat is positioned as a resister who helps the Crosswhite family get to the free state of Indiana by rowing them across the Ohio River in a small rowboat. She surprises the Crosswhite family because “she rows them across by pulling the oars with the power of a grown man” (p. 22) and calms them along the long journey. Polacco positions her as a someone who has long been a resister of the institution of slavery by helping slaves escape in this way: “I done this so many times I know every turn back, bottom rock, and whirl round in this here river . . . So don’t none of you need to fret! “ (p. 22). Because she is knowledgeable about the geography of the place she even points out to the Crosswhites the exact place when they enter the free land of Indiana. After the Crosswhites stumble onto a shore in Indiana, they recognize the courage of the girl in the boat by noting that “she had risked her life for them and probably many others yet they didn’t even know her name” (p. 27). This character serves to illustrate that there were courageous, strong and knowledgeable Blacks who worked on the Underground Railroad to strike a blow against slavery by helping enslaved Black escape from their masters.

### **The White Man with the Lantern.**

Although the Crosswhites arrive in the free state of Indiana, they still are not safe. However, initially their safety is ensured with a character who is positioned as a resister who meets them on the shore in Indiana when they are dropped of by the Black girl in the boat. The White Man with the Lantern arrives just in time to “call out to [the Crosswhite

family] . . . and lead them to the fields” (p. 29). He warns them that they have to move quickly because the fast approaching first light and reminds them that, “sometimes slave catchers are fast on the trail of runners [even if they have made it to free territory]” (p. 29). The resister’s warning comes just in time because they hear “dogs baying off in the distance” (p. 29), signaling that indeed Ford and Lee are on their trail. The White man with the lantern helps the Crosswhites to escape the slave hunters on that day by helping them to get to a barn where they hide away in a loft. This character illustrates that some Whites challenged the institution of slavery by helping escaped slaves in their flight towards freedom.

#### **Aunt Della and Miss Nancy Reid.**

Aunt Della and Miss Nancy are introduced towards the middle of the book. They are positioned as resisters who help the Crosswhites stay and survive in freedom in Marshall, Michigan. Although they have a level of freedom in Marshall, Aunt Della and Miss Nancy are also in an unequal position of power; they are also positioned as victims. They are a part of a group of sixty runaway slaves in the town who recognize that they also can be dragged back into slavery. Because of this they move around the town cautiously and feel fortunate that there are White collaborators in the town “who don’t cotton to keeping slaves” (p. 36). In essence, “they are dead set against it” (p. 36) and do what they can to protect the Blacks who live there from being dragged back into bondage. When they first arrive in Marshall, the Crosswhites stay with Aunt Della.

While they are staying with her in her home, Aunt Della and Nancy Reid help to get them situated in the town and help Sarah with domestic duties and the comforting of the Crosswhite children who still live with the fear of being recaptured. Aunt Della lets

them know that they can “stay for awhile till [they] get their bearings” (p. 38), and Nancy Reid warns them that for them to stay in freedom in Marshall they “can’t never tell White folks [who they don’t trust] that they are runaways” (p. 38). Like the Black girl in the Boat, both women illustrate the role that some Blacks played in helping enslaved Blacks resist the institution of slavery through flight.

### **The White Folks of Marshall, Michigan.**

There are a number of White characters, most of them unnamed, who are positioned as resisters in the story. It is because of these resisters that the Crosswhites manage to stay in Marshall, Michigan, until they head off to Canada. They do not report the Crosswhites to the authorities and provide them with jobs, and when slave hunters descend on the town to take them back to their master, they help them to escape.

When they arrive in Marshall, a Black character named Auction Bell shares with the Crosswhites that “they’s White folks here we trust that trust and will give you work [and] their children can even go to school [with them] and git some book learnin” (p. 38). This proves to be true when Adam gets a job at White man at mercantile store and Mr. Ingersoll, a White lawyer, gets a job for John at a mill. Furthermore, Ben, Cyrus and Sadie are allowed to attend an interracial school taught by White teachers.

While at school, Sadie meets a young girl named Polly with whom she develops a genuine bond and friendship. Polacco writes that after a time “you almost never saw Polly with Sadie or Sadie with Polly” (p. 43). As the two become fast friends Polly looks out for Sadie and helps her to adjust to her new life in Marshall and Sadie shares many details about her family past with Polly. Sadie visits Polly’s house often where she “plays dolls up in [her] room and [while they talk]” (p. 44) and “Polly [teaches] Sadie how to

make snowmen and snow angels [then she] takes [her] sledding down deep hills at Ingersoll's Holler by the mill" (p. 47).

At the end of the story, it is Polly's commitment to supporting and protecting her friend Sadie that ultimately helps the Crosswhites escape the slave catchers who have found them Marshall. When Sadie shares with her father Judge Hobart that slave hunters try to return the Crosswhites to the Giltner plantation and about her past, he has them jailed for the assault of and attempted kidnapping of the family. Because Judge Hobart is a justice with the power to put people in prison, his act as a powerful White man in Marshall provides the Crosswhites with additional time to leave the town and begin their journey towards legal freedom in Canada. It is because of White resisters Polly and Judge Hobart that the Crosswhites manage to stay in freedom. In essence, it is partially because of the White folks of Marshall that the Crosswhites manage to survive in halfway between slavery and freedom for some time and then begin their journey to Canada.

### **Moses Patterson.**

Moses Patterson is a Black character who exercises collaborative power. In the story Patterson's actions help protect the Black runaway slaves of Marshall from being captured and dragged back into bondage. Patterson provides newly arrived runaways like the Crosswhites with information about lodging, work, and school and makes it his business to keep an eye out for unfamiliar Whites who may be hunters come to town. Throughout their time in Marshall, Moses helps the Crosswhites to adapt to life halfway between slavery and freedom and then when they about to be captured by slave hunters to gather a group of individuals who help them make their escape to Canada. Moses is positioned as a person who is resisting the institution by helping Blacks to stay in

freedom. Like many of the other characters in Marshall he is instrumental in helping the Crosswhites maintain their place and survive in freedom.

### **A Critical Examination of Gender, Race, and Class**

Similar to the other neo-slave narratives included in this study, *January's Sparrow* presents a female character's narrative about the long road from slavery to freedom. Like *Sojourner Truth's Step-Stomp and Stride* and *Moses: When Harriet Led Her People to Freedom* the text places a woman at the center of the narrative. Although others characters are featured, it is Sadie who is featured the most in the book. Similar to *Sojourner Truth's Step-Stomp and Stride* and *Moses: When Harriet Led Her People to Freedom* *January Sparrow* is a text that can be read as one that seeks to speak to the female experience in slavery. Furthermore, like Davis Pinkney and Boston Weatherford, Polacco includes female characters in her narrative to show that enslaved Black women were committed to claiming power over their own lives through flight

Beyond featuring this Black woman's quest for emancipation, *January's Sparrow* also strongly genders the experience of those who lived during the antebellum period. Throughout the story male and female characters have specific gendered characteristics and roles. In the story the female characters are depicted as warm, nurturing, and protective and primarily responsible for domestic tasks. For example, it is Sarah who plays the role of nurturer and caretaker. She supports her husband in his role as the leader and planner of their initial escape. She also emotionally supports her children in slavery and flight and is joined by other Black female characters, Miss Nancy Reid and Aunt Della, in protecting the children and maintaining their household in Marshall. Polacco also represents the Black female characters as domestic caretakers through her paintings.

Throughout the text women are shown wearing aprons, cooking, and taking care of or comforting children (see Figures 45 and 46).



Figure 45. Illustration by Patricia Polacco from *January's Sparrow*.



Figure 46. Illustration by Patricia Polacco from *January's Sparrow*.

Polly, a young White female character, is also presented in a manner that illustrates the warmth and protective nature of women. Through the story there are a number of instances where she takes care of Sadie and her family. She provides much support to Sadie and her siblings in adjusting to life halfway between slavery and freedom in Marshall. Then she persuades her father to help protect Sadie's family from slave catchers who are attempting to return them to Giltner's plantation.

The Black women in *January's Sparrow* are also represented as strong and courageous. For instance, the Black girl in the boat, an Underground Railroad conductor, has the strength to row seven members of the Crosswhite family across the Ohio River to Indiana, and she continually risks her life to help other Blacks escape slavery. Her strength is also illustrated in a full-page illustration that shows her "pullin on them oars



with the power of a grown man” (p. 22) to take the Crosswhite family through the strong currents of the Ohio River to Indiana (see Figure 47). Aunt Della also shows courage as she uses her home to as a station for the Underground Railroad, and Sarah and Sadie show great strength in surviving their long journey towards freedom.



Figure 47. Illustration by Patricia Polacco from *January's Sparrow*.

Although they are not at the center of the narrative, Polacco develops the male characters in *January's Sparrow* enough so that they are clearly represented differently from their female counterparts in a number of ways. Throughout the story it is Black male characters who are presented as the leaders and the planners of the resistance of slavery through flight, secrecy, and hiding. It is Adam who is at the forefront of the planning; and in the town of Marshall. It is Moses Patterson who takes the lead in helping escaped Blacks like the Crosswhites to successfully hide out.

Polacco depicts the central Black male characters in a manner that clearly illustrates that they are knowledgeable and savvy individuals who carry out actions that help keep Blacks in freedom. Furthermore, the adult Black male characters in *January's Sparrow* differ from their female counterparts because they do not perform any domestic duties; they work outside of the home to make money for the family.

While Polacco represents a division of labor based on gender among Blacks, her book asserts that there was no difference between men and women when it came to the

thirst and quest for freedom. Like their female counterparts, all the Black characters are resisting slavery are presented as strong, courageous, and resilient. The character January illustrates the strength of Black men by enduring and surviving a brutal beating and Adam certainly show courage in leading his family on a difficult journey towards freedom. Both men also symbolize the resilience of Black men living during the antebellum period.

A number of White male characters in the story are also rendered as courageous because they stand up against slavery by hiding away Black fugitives and rebuffing the slave catchers who make their way to Marshall to capture the Crosswhites. However, Polacco also bestows a characteristic upon White men that dispels the assertion that White slave owners were supportive and kind. The cruelty of Master Giltner and the paddy rollers is certainly evident through their micro-interactions with the Black characters. Through words and images Polacco depicts the brutality of these White men by including detailed scenes that show them beating and torturing January, and then hunting after the Crosswhite family and trying to return them to slavery by any means.

Of all the texts featured in this study *January's Sparrow* is the most explicit in depicting White supporters of slavery as oppressive. In fact, of all the books in my text collection, *January's Sparrow* paints them in the most negative manner. These White characters are not kind and caring. They are extremely cruel and violent. Because of this representation of White slave owners and their supporters, the text can be read as another counter-narrative that recasts racial violence to reject the proslavery discourse about a slave system where Blacks were treated kindly and well by a paternalistic slave system.

. Throughout the text, Polacco explicitly details the cruel treatment slaves endured

through images and words. The images in the book are so detailed that a number of reviewers have argued that the text is one of the most effective picture-book representations of the inhumane conditions of slavery and illustrations of the harsh treatment slaves experienced at the hands of their White masters (Bush, 2010; Carter 2010). The story details the hardships of slavery and the cruel treatment Black slaves endured at the hands of their White masters.

For instance, Polacco begins the book with a scene that takes place over nine pages that vividly captures the brutal violence that White used to keep Blacks in slavery. Polacco does not shy away from a consideration of the existence of racial violence that took place under slavery. In an essay titled “Narrative Tensions: Telling Slavery, Showing Violence”, Patricia Connolly (2003) writes that picture books about slavery that contain brutal violence have been for the most part absent from the world of children’s literature. She notes that this absence may be due to the problematic nature of representing historical atrocities to young children in picture books. She writes that “clearly the problem of publishing picture books about such issues derives from the specific age of the books: intended audience: to erase the violence of such events would be to mitigate the atrocity itself, yet could easily alienate or terrify very young children” (p. 107). Connolly argues that to deal with this problem, recent picture books about slavery have represented violence in slavery symbolically. She uses scenes from *Aunt Harriet Underground Railroad in the Sky*, *Sweet Clara and Freedom Quilt*, and *Follow the Drinking Gourd* to support this claim.

Unlike these texts and many other picture books about slavery for children, Polacco does not rely on symbols to represent the violence and oppression of slavery for young

readers. In *January's Sparrow* the depiction of physical violence and atrocity is on full display from the beginning of the text. After introductory image of January's bloodied hands, Polacco uses the next four pages to create a multi-paged illustration that shows January being dragged back to plantation by the White overseers. On one page, there is a full-bleed image of January. His clothes are bloodied and are tattered from what appears to be an earlier beating. His heels, knees, torso, chest, elbows, shoulders, wrists, forehead, and mouth are covered with blood (see Figure 39). On the next page, a picture of the long bloodied rope stretches across the page, with a caption dedicating the book to the "amazing Crosswhite Family and their descendants" (p. 3). Polacco writes this dedication with "respect, honor, and awe for their courage" (p. 3) It represents that Black slaves were courageous and brave in the face of such atrocity and cruelty that was carried out upon them by White men. After the image of the rope, Polacco ends the multi-paged illustration with an image of two of these White men, as the two overseers in the scene are featured upon horseback, looking backwards with whips in their hands and yelling.

In the two pages that follow the multi-page illustration, Polacco uses images and texts to represent the fear that Blacks felt as they witnessed the violence that Whites carried out upon them on the slave plantation. In two illustrations that each take up almost a page and a half, Polacco shows the Crosswhite family with shocked and sad faces as they witness the beating of their foster brother January from the porch of their quarters (see Figure 41). With the use of dull colors and melodramatic character expressions with these images Polacco conveys the fear that John Hope Franklin and Laura Schweninger (1999) maintain that slave owners hoped their slaves would feel after a public flogging. They note that the public flogging was one way that masters terrorized

their slaves to keep them oppressed.

In the text that accompanies these images, Polacco also illustrates the cruel nature of White supporters of slavery. She notes that, “all the slaves were ordered to stand on at the porch rail that morning [and watch]” (p. 6) and writes about the whipping, kicking, and stomping that January receives. On page 10 her narrator recounts the scene:

Master Giltner stood over January. “This here dirty-eatin’, lazy no account know January Drumm took up and ran. I want you all to see what happens to any brown-skinned devil that runs away from me!” he thundered. The he motioned the two men holdin’ black snake whips. They was Jimmy Lee and Will, his paddy rollers and overseers. First Ford whipped January across the back so hard that it cracked the air. With each lash, January’s flesh opened up in long red stripes almost to the bones. Then while Ford was takin’ a dipper of water, Lee commenced to whippin’ January in other directions so’s to make his flesh stand up in squares. Lee and Ford whipped and kicked the rags right off of him, but they couldn’t make January holler . . . When the beatin’ was done, Lee and Ford rubbed salt and pepper into Janaury’s open back. His skin jerked, quaked, and January twisted and puked up. . . but he never cried out even once [before he died]. (p.10)

The passage reveals the negative light that White supporters who saw their Black slave in and echoes Hope Franklin and Schweinger’s assertion about the reason for public floggings. It also uses language that vividly and horrifically illustrates the brutality of the beating. Polacco purposely uses phrases like “long red stripes almost to the bone” (p. 10) “black snake whips”[and] “includes the rubbing of slave and pepper into open wound” (p.10) to illustrate the horrible nature of the beating and to show the depth of White cruelty.

She also includes details about their response to the horrible incident they are forced to watch because they believe it served as a deterrent to those Blacks who, like January, were considering the option of escaping slavery through flight. She writes that “the [Crosswhite] brothers gripped the rail” (p. 6) in fear when they saw the scene and that

“Sadie shuddered when she saw the [White] paddy rollers (slave patrollers) thunder into the yard dragging a runaway on the end of a rope behind them” (p. 6). After this Sadie “fell to her knees [and her] heart broke as they smote him and pushed him facedown in the dirt to stake his arms and legs” (p. 8).

Sadie’s description of the final part of the brutal beating that is captured in the opening scene of *January’s Sparrow* is also captured through image. In the vivid illustration, January lies almost unconscious faced down staked to the ground with blood pouring from his body, but the image also reveals more than Sadie has shared. The White overseers are pictured stomping and whipping January. In the background a group of plantation owners supervises the event with crossed arms. Meanwhile, the images of other slaves on the plantation reveal the sadness and fear of enslaved Blacks who lived under a system where brutal violence was used to control and oppress. In the image some of enslaved Black characters cover their faces in fear while others cover their mouth to signal their shock of such brutality.

In the opening pages of *January’s Sparrow*, Polacco’s representation of slavery challenges historians like U. B. Phillips’ claim of the kind and caring slave system and turns it on its head with a dramatic illustration of the brutal physical violence of slavery. As reviewer Jacquie Skurla (2009) points out after reading such a graphically violent opening scene, “there is no doubt that the master was an extremely cruel slave owner” (p. 55). In Polacco’s representation of slavery, the cruel nature of White slave supporters is clear. To maintain a system that benefitted them some White men approved of carrying out extreme violence against Blacks. In representing this violence in this manner at the beginning of *January’s Sparrow*, the text provides a dramatic testimony to the trauma

that Black suffered and conveys violence that was at the center of the institution of slavery in the United States. This representation seeks to horrify, move, and inform young readers that an institution, where people are kept as property, should never be viewed as one that was kind and caring.

Beyond presenting this powerful counter-narrative via the opening scene, as one moves through *January's Sparrow* I would argue that the text can also be read as one that strongly challenges the assertion that Black slaves were content with their plight in slavery. Even though the Crosswhite family witnesses the harsh punishment of January for trying to escape, they still set out on their own flight towards freedom. During this flight the six members of the family sneak through the woods to avoid being discovered, cross rough waters in a small road boat, and run from slave hunters and their dogs in their attempt to make their way to the free lands of Canada. The narrative paints a picture of Blacks as being courageous and strong in the face of a horribly oppressive institution. This text is similar to many of the other picture books in my text collection.

### **Production Practices of *Night Running***

*Night Running: How James Escaped With the Help of His Faithful Dog*, which is based on a true story, pairs an acclaimed historical fiction writer with a Caldecott Honor artist in a gripping and luminously illustrated journey to freedom. The author of *Night Running: How James Escaped With the Help of His Faithful Dog*, Elisa Carbone, came across the story while writing the historical-fiction novel *Stealing Freedom* (1998) and decided to create a picture book that is based on it. Caldecott Honor winner E. B. Lewis's stunning watercolors, some covering the entire spread, help convey the story in ways words cannot. The book is constructed as a 40-page traditional picture book. Throughout

the book there is alternating text and half-page illustrations on one page and full-page illustrations on the next page. The book has been classified as a lower grade level text (Kindergarten-4th grade). A one-page author's note at the end of the book focuses on the research that Carbone conducted to discover details about James's story. A number of reviewers have noted that the text is an excellent way to teach some aspects of this history to young children (Peters 2008; Cobb, 2008).

Elisa Carbone has written a number of children's books that represent historical events, including young adult novels about colonial life, frontier life and slavery. She notes that "for all of [her] books, especially the historical ones she adds a significant amount of research to the imaginative process (Carbone, 2008). Furthermore, she adds that her "research always involves reading books, articles, and original records, doing interviews, and visiting the sites where my stories take place" (Carbone, 2008).

Carbone has also shared that when writing historical fiction she "focuses mostly on original sources rather than secondary sources because they have more life to them. This certainly was the case in regard her research for fictional works about slavery. When she conducted research for *Stealing Freedom* and *Night Running: How James Escaped With the Help of His Faithful Dog*, she read hundreds of first person slave narratives. In an interview conducted by her publicist in 2009, she shared that she prepared to write both books she read slave narrative for hours and that she had over 2,000 pages of slave narratives in her personal library. According to Carbone, this process helped her feel like she had gone back in time to the era of slavery and helped her to accurately represent the true story of James Smith and how his faithful hunting dog helped him to escape from slavery.



Like Elisa Carbone, E. B. Lewis has illustrated many picture books that focus on history and require research. Lewis, one of the finest watercolor artists in the United States, and an illustrator since 1992, has helped to create 59 picture books and has won many awards, including a Caldecott Honor and the Coretta Scott King awards. Similar to Carbone, Lewis believes it is extremely important to do extensive research to accurately recreate historical scenes. Lewis noted that for every picture book he creates he immerses himself in the subject in an effort to represent fluent characters. To Lewis, this fluency means visually representing all the nuances of characters and the setting. Lewis has been recognized for effectively depicting the world of slavery in a number of picture books. In fact, he has received awards for his illustrations in eight picture books about slavery that feature his artwork.

### **Summary of *Night Running***

*Night Running: How James Escaped With the Help of His Faithful Dog* (2008) is a story based on the true story of the escape of a slave named James Smith who was aided in his flight from the slave state of West Virginia to Ohio by his faithful hunting dog Zeus. At the beginning of the story, James tells his friend that he will escape that evening. However, he is captured because his friend sells the information about James' attempt to escape to White men who capture him. Sure to be severely punished, James is lucky to be rescued by his dog Zeus. At first, James shows a real lack of faith in Zeus, continually trying to get rid of him, afraid that he will somehow foil the escape. However, Zeus helps James get through a number of frightening situations as he makes his flight towards freedom. Finally, James realizes how loyal Zeus is and that he should be appreciated. This realization coincides with James finally making his way into freedom in Ohio, and

then Canada.

### **Exercise of Power Among Characters**

*Night Running: How James Escaped With the Help of his Faithful Dog* is narrated from a third-person point of view. Because a third-person multiple narration is used the narrator provides details about what the cast of characters say, do, and see. However, similar to *January's Sparrow* the narrator primarily follows the main character James. Throughout the story, the narrator makes apparent what James and the other characters say, see, and do.

#### **James.**

James begins the story positioned as a victim because he is enslaved on a farm in West Virginia. However, he is quickly positioned as a character who is willing to resist and change his social position when he declares on the first page that he “fixing to runaway” (p. 1). He shares with his dog Zeus that he is “done being a slave on Master Graham’s farm” (p. 1). In attempt to take control of his social situation, James sets out to follow the North Star to Canada. Throughout the text James’s determination to be free is continuously displayed. He manages to escape when he is re-captured by the overseers. When slave-catching dogs discover him in flight, he clubs them back with a heavy branch that he breaks off from a tree. He also sleeps during the day under the cover of dry leaves, runs all night, and captures squirrels to eat to survive his long journey towards freedom.

#### **Zeus.**

James’ dog is positioned as a character that helps him to resist slavery. Throughout the book Zeus helps James to overcome a number of obstacles to find his way to freedom. Zeus comes to his rescue when the overseers try to capture him in the woods. Then, when

the slave catchers' dogs attack, it is Zeus who fends them off so the boy can escape. After they escape James tries to cross the Ohio River in an old canoe, but the boat sinks and Zeus pulls him to land on the safe side of the river.

### **Levi.**

Initially, Levi, who is also a slave, is positioned as victim who seeks to resist by joining James on a flight towards freedom. At the beginning of the book, he meets James in a clearing to plan their escape. However, Levi is later positioned as a collaborator who is working to maintain the institution when he reports James's plans to escape to the overseers. Readers learn that he has sold the information to the overseers, so in collaborating with the overseers, he is rewarded. James is the only slave character found in the books featured in this study who colludes with White characters to keep other slaves in bondage.

### **Four Female Slaves.**

Four Black women appear in the first illustration at the beginning of the text. As slaves on Master Graham's plantation, they are positioned as victims. They are shown in a field picking cotton. While readers can see what they do through the illustrations, they are not provided with any further details about their lives. They do not speak, and the narrator does not share what they feel or think. After their appearance in the first illustration, these women do not appear in any other part of *Night Running: How James Escaped With the Help of his Faithful Dog*.

### **The White Overseers.**

At the beginning of *Night Running: How James Escaped With the Help of his Faithful Dog*, two overseer characters, who exercise coercive power, are incorporated

into the narrative. Because of Levi both men capture James and begin to punish him for attempting to run away. First, they “tie his hands behind him” (p. 8). Then, one of them, referred to as the bald man, “cuts a hickory switch and brings it down on James shoulders. . .like a rattlesnake on fire” (p. 8). After this, they take him to a cow barn and tie him to a milking stool and water-board him with whiskey until he becomes unconscious. In this micro-interaction, Carbone and Lewis illustrate one type of corporal punishment that was carried out against Blacks to keep them oppressed under slavery. The White overseers are included in *Night Running: How James Escaped With the Help of his Faithful Dog* to show that there were Whites who supported slavery because they benefitted from it. As overseers, they supported the system because they were compensated for overseeing the slaves on the plantation. Their position in the text speaks to the role that class played in shaping the slave system. Although the overseers benefitted from the slave system, they were certainly not at the top of it. They were ahead of Blacks but they were below and beholden to the White man who owned the plantation and the slaves. The overseers plan to take James to Master Graham in the morning for the final decisions about his punishment, but their plans will go awry, when miraculously James manages to escape again.

### **Master Graham.**

Although he is only briefly mentioned, Master Graham is represented from a place of dominance because he owns James. After the overseers capture James as he attempts to run away the first time, they make it clear that while they will punish him, it is “Master Graham who will determine what to do with him come morning” (p. 8). Master Graham is in a clear position of dominance because he determines what will happen to James. As

his owner, Master Graham creates many aspects of James's social condition. Because of his class, he is in a dominant position. As the man who owns the plantation and the slaves he makes the final decision about his property. In essence, in *Night Running* the Master Graham character shows how race and class work together in the antebellum period. Being a White man with property placed Master Graham in a dominant position.

### **The White Farmer and His Wife.**

At the end of the book, a Quaker White farmer and his wife are introduced in the narrative. Both are positioned as resisters who help James to stay in freedom. After James makes his way to the free side of Ohio, he meets the farmer who turns out to be a friend. Although he knows James is a runaway, he does not turn in the boy. Instead, he lets James know that he should not be afraid and that he is a friend. He takes James to his farm, where his wife fixes him something to eat and then they take him to a barn where he sleeps for the first time on a pile of sweet-smelling hay in a free state.

### **A Critical Examination of Gender, Race, and Class**

*Night Running: How James Escaped With the Help of his Faithful Dog* differs from the other texts analyzed in this study thus far because women are silent and are on the periphery in this narrative. Although five women are visually represented in the book, none of them have significant roles. Although there are four female slaves represented in the first illustration they are silent and do not reappear in the story. They are simply represented working in a cotton field. Because they are portrayed as wearing white and at such a distance that we do not see their faces, we learn little about them from the image beyond the type of work that they do.

Similarly, the White farmer's spouse is only mentioned briefly in a context that

illustrates a gendered role that White women may have occupied during the time.

Incorporating the farmer's wife by stating that she "fixed pork stew and fresh bread for James and stale bread with pork gravy for Zeus" (p. 38) after her husband brought him to their farm, Carbone shows that the domestic task of preparing food was women's work. Carbone makes it clear that her husband sees this as her work, while he shares with the boy that "my wife will fix you something to eat." (p. 36). Beyond the Black women who are featured as working in the fields, this is the only act women carry out in the text.

In essence, the Black female experience is not presented with any depth in *Night Running: How James Escaped With the Help of his Faithful Dog*. They appear and then disappear abruptly. There are no details in the text about the unique experience of Black women living under slavery. Readers are not presented with any details that speak to whether the experience of Black women was unique under slavery.

White women are also, for the most part, silenced in this text. Although a White woman, the farmer's wife, appears at the end of the text and is positioned as a resister, she does not talk, and the narrator does not share any details about her thoughts or feelings. Readers simply learn that she is a resister because she fixes food for James as he makes a stop at her husband's farm in his journey towards freedom. Overall, *Night Running: How James Escaped With the Help of his Faithful Dog* is a story about the male experience in slavery. The story is about a Black slave boy's escape from slavery and features details about a White man who owned slaves and other White men who supported the institution and another who challenged it by assisting James on his journey towards freedom. Here, there are the familiar tropes of the Black male slave who resists slavery, the distant and powerful master, the cruel White male overseer, and the kind and

helpful White male resister who works with Black slaves to escape slavery.

Similar to the other texts in my text collection, E. B. Lewis also works with Elisa Carbone to convey the cruelty of slavery in the picture book *Night Running: How James Escaped With the Help of his Faithful Dog* by presenting the mechanisms of control that were used by White slave owners to oppress and control their slaves. In the story there are a number of darkly painted illustrations that show the cruel nature of White slave owners and overseers and the violent and oppressive nature of the institution. One illustration shows James being beaten with a switch by a White man (see Figure 48), another shows vicious slave-catching dogs chasing James (see Figure 49), and one illustrates James being water-boarded with whiskey by two White overseers in a barn (see Figure 50). These darkly colored paintings highlight the peril that James faced from the White supporters of slavery.



Figure 48. Illustration by E. B. Lewis from *Night Running: How James Escaped With the Help of His Faithful Dog*.



Figure 49. Illustration by E. B. Lewis from *Night Running: How James Escaped With the Help of His Faithful Dog*.



Figure 50. Illustration by E. B. Lewis from *Night Running: How James Escaped With the Help of His Faithful Dog*.

Elisa Carbone's written text supports Lewis's visual construction of Whites as the cruel protectors of slavery who used brutal methods to keep Black slaves oppressed and in their place. In the story, after James has been captured, Carbone writes that "the bald man, [a White overseer], threw a switch down [on the boy] like it was a rattlesnake on fire." (p. 6). On another page she details the discovery of James by the overseer's pack of dogs. She writes: "They came howling and baying, with their big jaws open and teeth as sharp as bones." (p. 14). Similar to the other texts featured in this study, in dramatizing this harsh treatment of Black slaves in *Night Running*, Carbone and Lewis challenge the



historical argument of kind White masters and illustrate the how they exercised and maintained their dominance during slavery times.

However, similar to the other texts in my text collection, *Night Running: How James Escaped With the Help of his Faithful Dog* illustrates that all Whites did not view slavery in the same way; many worked with Blacks to resist it. Carbone and Lewis include the White farmer and his wife to make this point. As noted earlier, in the text the farmer tells the boy that he is his friend and assists with his entry to a free state. Lewis also signals the welcoming and friendly nature of the farmer with his paintings at the end of the book. In one of them, which is much lighter than those at the beginning of the text, the boy peacefully sleeps with Zeus in the White farmer's barn, and in another (see Figure 51) which is similarly lightly colored, James stands face to face with the White farmer. In this painting James and the White farmer stand face to face, each positioned on the opposite sides of the painting. James does not cower before the White man like he did with the White overseers. Instead, he stares at the White farmer's face, whose stance and countenance seem welcoming. In a way, the positioning of the boy and the man seem to signal a level of respect, understanding, and admiration that the two appear to have for each other.



Figure 51. Illustration by E. B. Lewis from *Night Running: How James Escaped With the Help of His Faithful Dog*.

Elisa Carbone and E. B. Lewis also present a representation of Black slaves that is similar to the other books featured in this study. Like many of the other Black enslaved characters in the other texts, although James suffers oppression at the hand of White supporters of slavery, he is not deterred from seeking freedom. Throughout the book, Carbone and Lewis use James to illustrate that some Blacks were determined to resist slavery through flight. Even though James is punished and faces many obstacles, he overcomes them all to find his way into freedom. However, another slave betrays him and reports his plan to escape. He is captured, beaten, and water-boarded. He is chased by a pack of fierce slave hunting dogs. He has to run throughout the night without sleep or food and has to find his way across to Ohio River to freedom. However, despite all of these challenges, the ending in which James finds freedom illustrates that James's tenacity to find freedom pays off in the end. He shows that Black slaves were not content with their place in slavery. His actions in the story show that they were determined to resist this institution.

### **Production Practices of *I Want to be Free***

*I Want To Be Free* (2009) written by Joseph Slate and *Night Running* illustrator E. B. Lewis, recognized as a picture book, would work well as a read aloud to introduce the Underground Railroad to an elementary school group (Spano, 2010). The book is made up of 32 pages in a traditional picture book format. Throughout the book there is alternating text and half-page illustrations on one page and full-page illustrations on the next page. The book has been classified as a lower grade level text (Kindergarten to 3rd grade) and was recognized as one the best historical fiction books for youth in 2009 by Booklist. It also appeared on the American Library Association's 2009 best books for

youth. The text ends with an author and illustrator's note that focuses on details about their creative process.

This book is based on a retelling of the story of Buddha and his disciple Ananda from Rudyard Kipling's "*Kim*." In recasting the tale, Joseph Slate moves the setting to the antebellum South and casts as speaker an escaping slave who rescues an orphaned and ill slave child. Slate has noted that he retells the story of Buddha and his disciple in this manner because he believes the theme of freedom is universal. He also shares that he did much research to accurately capture the experience of those who suffered under slavery. According to Slate, the story's rhythmic tone is intended to echo the songs from the slaves in the South and through the narrative he seeks to capture the various emotions and strength that those who suffered under slavery must have felt.

Furthermore, in the illustrator's note that appears at the end of *I Want to be Free*, E. B. Lewis shares that text is "a heroic story of the thirst for freedom by young people in the time of slavery." (p. 32). In this note, Lewis describes the extensive research that he conducted to recreate the historical setting and its characters. He notes that "the spirit of the book inspired [him] to further research slave narratives, safe houses and children who bravely and miraculously [escaped slavery]." (p. 32). Lewis also writes that, while doing research for the book, he visited Kentucky and went to the Underground Railroad safe spaces that existed along the Ohio River. During that journey he also "toured the Rankin House in Ripley, Ohio for the first time and stood still for awhile to reflect on the risky and humane actions that helped free slaves during those times." (p. 32).

### **Summary of *I Want to be Free***

*I Want to be Free* (2009) by Joseph Slate and E. B. Lewis is another story that represents the flight towards freedom. The text begins when the main character, a young male slave, attempts to escape from a plantation. This flight into freedom does not last long as he is quickly tracked down and shackled with a heavy ball and ring. However, the young slave is not deterred. Shortly after being dragged back into bondage, he escapes again by breaking the chain that connects the ball and ring. However, this time he is in flight with the iron ring around his ankle that he cannot remove. In his flight towards freedom, he comes across a camp of maroons (escaped slaves living in the forest) and then narrowly escapes a group of slave hunters and their dogs.

Then he rescues a crying slave child who is hiding in a field and learns that his mother is dead. Because he is abandoned and all alone, the boy decides to take the orphaned child with him on the flight towards freedom. Along the way, they use their wits to survive and stay on the run by making gruel from cow's milk and field corn, and by traveling at night. The two boys eventually find the land of the free, and the ring on the main character's ankle falls off with some tinkering by the young boy who he has helped to find freedom.

### **Exercise of Power Among Characters**

In *I Want to be Free*, the first-person perspective is used to represent a narrative. The main character reports what he and the other characters, Big Man, slaves on the farm, a camp of maroons, and a young orphaned slave boy think, see, say, feel, and do. Again, it is from a Black slave perspective that the institution of slavery is understood. It is from the perspective of a young slave boy who wants to be free that readers discover details

about how he and others struggled for, against, and under slavery.

### **The Main Character.**

Readers are not presented with the main character's name in *I Want to be Free*; however, they learn the most about him as a person because the story is written from his perspective. At the beginning of the story he is positioned as a victim because he is owned by Big Man. However,, it is clear from the beginning of the story that the main character is not content with his status as a slave and that he will resist it. From the first page of the text the main character recounts that “before [he] dies, [he] wants to be free [even though] Big Man says you belong to me” (p. 1). Throughout the text the main character's resistance and agency is illustrated by way of his tenacity and determination that to gain his freedom. Setbacks do not deter him and in time he successfully escapes Big Man's plantation and find freedom with the assistance of Black and White allies along the way. He even becomes an ally himself as he adopts an orphaned youth, and brings him along on his successful journey to freedom.

### **Big Man.**

Throughout the book, Big Man, a White slave owner on the farm where the main character is enslaved, is in a place of dominance. The story begins with Slate demonstrating Big Man's dominance over the main character when he states that the boy “belongs to me” (p. 1). After this, Slate and Lewis render his dominance by showing that he knowingly controls, oppresses, and dehumanize Blacks. All the micro-interactions that Big Man is involved in throughout the book show that he is keenly committed to doing whatever it takes to keep Blacks enslaved on his farm.

For instance, he captures and then drags the main character back onto the

plantation after his initial escape and then binds him in a shed like an animal with a ball and chain. He also brutally beats the main character with a whip for running away, leaving him bloodied and scarred. Lewis powerfully portrays these scenes with detailed watercolor paintings. In these paintings, Big Man always has a stern look on his face and in one of them, which is on the opening page, Lewis represents the dominant position that Big Man inhabits by rendering him much larger than the other slaves who stand before him. Additionally, after the main character escapes, Big Man continues to attempt to exercise power over his social circumstances by setting out with his dogs and shotgun in hand to track down the boy. Although he does not find the boy, his act in setting out to find him places him again in a dominant position.

Because Big Man lives on a small farm instead of a large plantation and has to oversee his own slaves, his socio-economic standing differs from that of the other slave masters represented in my text collection. The Big Man character shows that not all slave owners were extremely wealthy and that White men of modest means owned slaves too. However, the Big Man character also shows that men of modest means who own slaves were faced with the reality that owning slaves demanded much of their time.

### **Slaves on Big Man's Farm.**

There are a number of other slaves on Big Man's farm who appear in illustrations at the beginning of the book. They are silent and are not acknowledged by the main character. However, being illustrated as slaves on the farm positions them as victims. Additionally, in one of the illustrations we see the dehumanizing nature of their victimhood status. One of the slaves, a young boy, lies on ground after he is beaten by Big Man. His back is bloody and scarred and he is surrounded by a number of other

slaves who look over him somberly. However, they do not attempt to help him, because Big Man stands off in a distance. In their brief appearance in the text, these slaves remain in their position as victims.

### **The Camp of Maroons.**

In the middle of the story, the main character comes across another group of Blacks who have managed to resist slavery through flight and have set up a camp that is hidden away from the slave owners. Although they are shown via illustrations they are silent. Readers learn from the main character that there is a “camp of free gone men” (p. 12). By way of the main character’s encounter with the “camp of free gone men,” Slate and Lewis position the camp of free men as individuals who have successfully exercised power across the continuum. Because they have successfully escaped slavery and have set up their own camp, they have moved from victims to successful resisters of slavery.

Lewis and Slate show a particular type of resistance that is unique to their storytelling no other picture book featured in this study represents this type of resistance. By including a camp of maroons living in the woods where slavery is legal, Slate and Lewis show that not all Blacks resisting slavery through flight sought out free land. In fact, as historian Sylvain Diouf (2014) notes in her recent book about maroon slaves, there were a number of runaways who existed, hid, and survived on the borderlands of slave society. The camp of maroon characters in *I Want to be Free* symbolize that there were Black runaways who willingly lived halfway between slavery. These runaways lived in maroon camps that were set up in the woods near slave plantations and farms.

### **The Orphaned Slave Boy.**

Appearing towards the latter end of *I Want to be Free*, an orphaned slave boy is initially positioned as a victim. He has lost his mother who was in flight towards freedom and is discovered by the main character crying in the woods. The main character provides him with assistance and then takes him on his own journey towards freedom. Then the boy moves into a position of resistance as the two work as a team to make their way to freedom. On their journey to what they refer to as the land of the free, they take cow milk and field corn to provide themselves with food and at a time find places to hide in the corn field so that they can hide away to avoid discovery. Then once they have arrived safely in the land of the free, in a scene that takes place over three pages, the orphaned boy touches the shackle on the main character's leg that no one else was able to remove, and "it falls way" (p. 30). In a very sentimental painting, Lewis pictures a single tear on the main character's face (see Figure 52) as he says, "How, dear child, did you set me free. You cared for me." (p. 31). The scene shows the boy has helped the main character to do away with a significant reminder and signal that he once belonged to Big Man. Ending the story with the shackle falling away from the main character signals that he is finally free and no longer belongs to Big Man. Lewis's representation of the characters' faces in the painting also illustrates the excitement and relief that they both feel.





Figure 52. Illustration by E. B. Lewis from *I Want to be Free*.

### **A Critical Examination of Gender, Race, and Class**

Similar to in *Night Running*, women are silenced and on the periphery of this narrative about slavery. There are no White women in the text and Black women do not have a voice. While women are visually represented in a few illustrations, there is limited focus on their experience. In fact, ironically, in the part of the story that focuses on the camp of maroons, although women are pictured in Lewis's illustrations that depict the group, Slate chose to have the main character refer to them as the "camp of gone-free men." While Black women appear throughout the text, the main character does not share any details about them.

In *I Want to be Free* the only insights that readers get about the Black female experience in slavery come from the few illustrations in which they are featured. As in *Night Running*, a number of female slaves working in a cotton field, six, appears in the first illustration of the text. After this introduction on the second page, there is a picture of a young slave girl standing next to the main character in front of their master. Another image renders a slave woman standing in the doorway of her quarters who looks on as a ball and chain is placed on the main character as punishment for running away. Using

these images, Lewis visually illustrates the type of work and helplessness that women endured under the institution.

For example, in the double page that shows the woman watching from her quarters as the main character is about to be punished for running away, She silently looks at the punishment, knowing that she cannot help the boy (see Figure 53). Then, shortly after



Figure 53. Illustration by E. B. Lewis from *I Want to be Free*.

this, this helplessness is also shown as three Black female characters are pictured in a state of despair sitting beside the main character and comforting him because his back has just been bloodied by Big Man's whip (see Figure 54). Readers learn from these images that Black women suffered under slavery as victims much like the men did.



Figure 54. Illustration by E. B. Lewis from *I Want to be Free*.

However, in *I Want to be Free*, there is not much more offered in regards to the Black woman's experience in slavery. Instead, what is foregrounded in *I Want to be Free*

is a narrative about the Black male slave resisting the cruel White slave master through flight. Similar to *Night Running* what is featured in this text are the familiar tropes of the Black male slave who resists slavery and the powerful and cruel White male owner who works to maintain an institution that he thoroughly benefits from by keeping other humans subjugated.

*I Want to be Free* is similar to the other books in this text collection because it too challenges the assertion of the benevolent and benign slave owner. E.B. Lewis's illustrations make it clear to readers that White slave owners were certainly not kind and caring. Lewis assists Slate in challenging the assertion that the slave system had many kind, caring, and paternalistic slave masters by constructing one who certainly is not. Lewis starts the book with an illustration on the first page that represents a White slave owner as a menacing and mean figure (see Figure 55).



Figure 55. Illustration by E. B. Lewis from *I Want to be Free*.

In the illustration, Lewis positions the White slave owner, Big Man, higher on the page, making him larger than a group of Black slaves. He also paints the owner with a stern look that is aimed squarely upon the group of slaves who are standing still. This picture reveals much about the status of slave owners and their slaves. In a way, the high position of the slave owner on the page reveals his high social status and power. In contrast, the low position of the Black slaves on the page seeks to represent their

disadvantageous position in society. This illustration provides some insight into the positioning of owners and slaves during slavery times. While the illustration, if it stood on its own, may seem to represent the slave owner as a stern fatherly figure who is standing over his slaves, it is the first in a series of images combined with words that clearly make visible the cruelty of White owners and oppression of slavery.

On the page that follows, with the first illustration, Joseph Slate's written text supports the assertion of the cruel White master and low position of the Black slave. He writes, "He takes a ring. Clamps me round, Gets a chain [and] binds me down" (p. 3). These words show to readers the tools of control, the clamp and ring, that were used by White masters to make sure slaves knew where they belonged – literally bound to plantation with mechanisms such as these (see Figure 56) to serve their owner.



*Figure 56. Illustration by E. B. Lewis from I Want to be Free.*

*Throughout I Want to be Free* Slate and Lewis combine detailed images and text to illustrate the mechanics of control and tools of torture that were used by cruel and callous White slave owners. On one page in the picture book, Slate describes the sound produced when the slave master uses his whip. He writes that the "Big Man's the whip whistles with fear." (p.5). Then, on the following page, E. B. Lewis illustrates the result of the act (see Figure 54). The main character lies on the ground, his back bloodied from a recent beating from his White owner, who stands off to the side in the distance with whip in

hand watching with a harsh look on his face as a group of female slaves tend to the beaten boy's wounds. On another page, an illustration of a group of armed White men, a slave patrol that is led by a group of vicious slave dogs on a hunt for the main character after he has exerted agency in flight towards freedom, is represented (see Figure 57). Even though it has been classified as a picture book for young readers, similar to the other picture books featured in this study Lewis and Slate do not hesitate to illustrate how White men used violence to maintain slavery.



Figure 57. Illustration by E. B. Lewis from *I Want to be Free*.

Slate and Lewis also do not hesitate to drive home the assertion that Blacks were not content with their plight in slavery. Similarly to the other texts featured in this study, *I Want to be Free* can also be read as a counter-narrative that challenges the historical discourse of the contented and docile Black slave. Beyond presenting the violence of slavery, *I Want to be Free* (2009) is also filled with written text and images that represent the Black slave's desire for freedom. As noted earlier from the beginning of the book, Slate makes this clear when he allows the main character to express that “before I die, I want to free” (p. 1).

Throughout the text the main character continues to share and show that he has a strong desire to attain freedom. Slate details the main character's difficult and perilous

journey to find free land. He makes his deep desire for freedom clear by continuously incorporating “I want to be free” into passages on the first five pages of the book that detail the young runaway being repeatedly captured and dragged back to the plantation. This strong desire to be free is certainly shown as the main character manages to escape after he is dragged back into bondage, and despite many obstacles, finds his way towards freedom.

Although *I Want to be Free* is similar to the other books in this study because it presents the trope of the cruel White slave master and the resisting runaway slave, it is distinct from the other texts in a few ways in its representation of race. Unlike the other picture books, *I Want to be Free* does not seek to show the varied views that Whites may have had about slavery. The only White characters represented in the book are those who support slavery and colluded to maintain it. There are no White resisters here. There are no White Quakers or abolitionists who help the main character make his way to freedom.

Instead, the main character finds support from Black characters unique to *I Want to be Free*—Black runaways slaves like the camp of maroon characters who appear in the text (see Figure 58). Slate and Lewis use these characters to illustrate the different

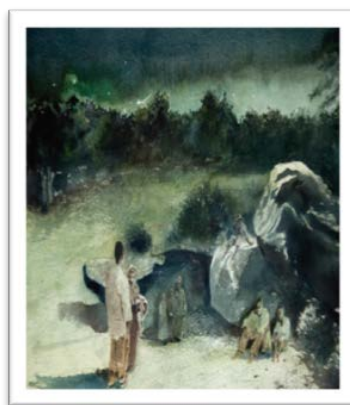


Figure 58. Illustrated by E. B. Lewis. Found in *I Want to be Free*.

experiences that Blacks had once they escaped their master's property. By including the camp of maroons they show that not all escaped slaves were looking for the managed to make their way to a place where slavery was illegal like the main character. The camp of maroons in the book allows readers to consider that there were various ways for Black slaves to experience life after escape. By placing the camp of free gone men characters in a clearing in the woods on the periphery of the White man's farm, Slate and Lewis allow readers to consider the experience of escaped Black slaves who hid themselves in the wild.

By including the camp of free gone men Slate and Lewis show that there were groups of escaped slaves who lived collectively on the periphery of plantations and farms. Their incorporation into the story also provokes readers to consider why these men chose to live on the periphery as opposed to seeking free lands. Did they want to be close to family? Was it their access to food and water? Were their hideaways difficult to discover? Did they move from place to place? The plethora of questions that readers may ask about the camp of free gone men is one reason that the text holds value in getting young people to consider what it was like for escaped Black slaves during the antebellum period. This inclusion is also the reason that the text stands apart from the other books in my text collection in its representation of the Black runaway slave.

### **Production Practices of *Show Way***

*Show Way* (2005), written by notable and multi-award winning writer Jacqueline Woodson and illustrated by Hudson Talbott, has been touted as an excellent addition to any classroom library because it presents a story that will move many readers to explore their own family roots (Rochman, 2005). Meredith Humphrey (2005) also argues that this

colorfully illustrated book, which is Jacqueline Woodson's evocative first-person account of her family's history back to her great-great-great-great grandmother, who was a slave, can serve as a springboard for conversations about different periods in African American history. The text is composed of 48 pages in a unique picture-book format that combines text, colorful and black and white illustrations, black and white photos, a few newspaper advertisements, and quilts and swatches of fabric that swirl around the pages. The book has been classified as a lower grade level text (Kindergarten to 4th grade) and has won a number of awards and honors. It garnered the Bank Street College of Education Best Children Book Award, Booklist's Best Black History Book for Youth, and the Children's Crown Award. It also won a Newbery Medal in 2006.

Woodson felt compelled to trace her family's history in *Show Way* after her grandmother died and her daughter was born. According to Woodson, she wanted to figure out a way to hold on to all the amazing history in her family. She wanted a *Show Way* for her own daughter and the picture book provided her with this opportunity to do so. For Woodson, *Show Way* also was a way to show that she had "come from a long line of people showing the way" (Woodson, 2006). Writing *Show Way* showed Woodson that she had come from an important somewhere.

### **Summary of *Show Way***

*Show Way* tells the story of Jacqueline Woodson's family from slavery to the twenty-first century. The story begins with the sale of Soonie's great-grandmother to a plantation in South Carolina. There, she learns to sew with colored thread and makes quilts that show slaves the way to freedom. Soonie's great-grandmother grows up to have a daughter of her own, who has Soonie, who has another daughter, and so on. Each



generation passes down the art of sewing meaningful designs into quilts, but now the descendants make the quilts to sell and not to help others to escape to freedom. Soonie's daughter Georgiana has twins, Carolina and Ann, who fight for the end of segregation. Ann then has Jacqueline, the author, who learns to write stories about the women who came before her and the path that showed them the way through their struggles.

### **Exercise of Power Among Characters**

*Show Way* is another text that is narrated from third-person point of view, much like *Night Running* and *January's Sparrow*. Throughout the text the narrator focuses on telling what a number of characters say, see, and do. As noted in the summary this text spans the author's family history from slavery to contemporary times. For the purposes of this study, only the characters represented during the antebellum time are included below.

#### **Soonie's Great Grandmother.**

At the beginning of the book, Soonie's great grandmother, who is a slave, is positioned as a victim in the text. At the beginning of the story, she is sold away or removed from her parents' care at the age of seven. She leaves her ma and pa with a little a "muslin that they gave her two needles from the big house, and thread dyed bright red with berries" (p.2). In the picture that renders Soonie's great grandmother's separation from her parents, she is pictured at the end of a coffle looking back longingly at her parents. In this double-page spread illustration, her parents have the same expression on their faces; all three characters are powerless to do anything to stop this horrible act (see Figure 59). Furthermore, her victimhood status as a slave is illuminated through the removal of her family.



Figure 59. Illustrated by Hudson Talbott from *Show Way*.

However, as the narrative progresses Soonie's great grandmother becomes an agent of change by sewing quilts, or show ways, which guide a number of slaves on the journey towards freedom. In presenting these details about Soonie's great grandmother Woodson is illuminating what historians Jacqueline Tobin and Raymond Dobard (2000) first posited as quilt code in their book, *Hidden in Plain View: A Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad*. According to Tobin and Dobard, the code was a way to say something to a person in the presence of many others without the others knowing; it was a way of giving directions without explicitly saying them. Specifically, quilts with patterns named "wagon wheel," "tumbling blocks," and "bear's paw" appear to have contained secret messages that helped direct slaves to freedom. In *Show Way* Tobin and Dobard's assertion is confirmed through this character and a number of quilts that are illustrated in the many of the colorful paintings that appear in the text (see Figures 60 and 61).



Figure 60. Illustrated by Hudson Talbott from *Show Way*.

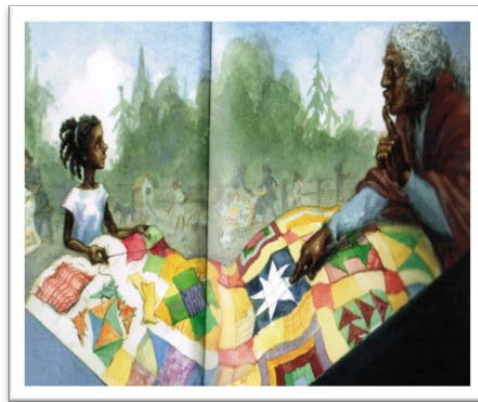


Figure 61. Illustrated by Hudson Talbott from *Show Way*.

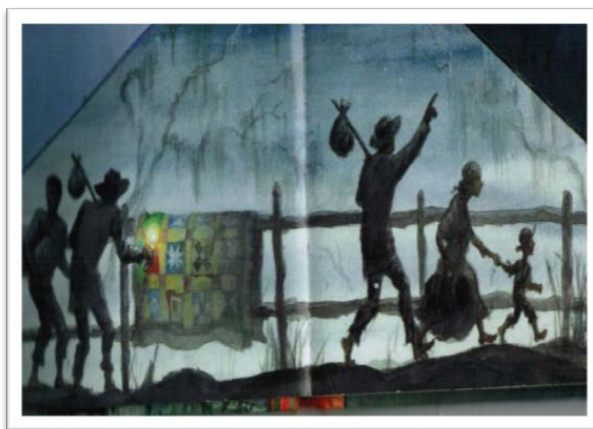
### **Soonie's Great Grandmother's Ma and Pa.**

Soonie's great grandmother's ma and pa appear in one illustration are mentioned briefly at the beginning of *Show Way*. The two are positioned as victims because they are enslaved and they have their daughter taken away from them. This micro-interaction illustrates the extremely vulnerable position that Black families endured under slavery. By writing that Soonie's great grandma was separated from her ma and pa "when she was seven and sold from Virginia land to a plantation in South Carolina" (p. 2), the text provides readers with a sense of how difficult it was for parents under slavery. Like Soonie's great grandma, ma, and pa, many enslaved parents had their young children torn away from them and sold to faraway places. The two characters show just how difficult it

was for parents under slavery, their children could be taken away at any time.

### **Big Mama.**

In the story *Big Mama*, an older female slave takes on the responsibility of raising the young children who, like Soonie's great grandmother, arrive on the South Carolina plantation. While Big Mama is positioned as a victim because she struggles under slavery she also seeks to be an agent of change. Big Mama's agency is illustrated in raising "most of the children on [the plantation]" (p. 4), helping them to survive, and whispering stories to them about "growing up and getting themselves free" (p. 4). By whispering these stories Big Mama encourage the children with the hope that someday they will find freedom. Big Mama is represented as a resister who eventually moves beyond just telling stories that might inspire young slaves on the plantation to seek freedom. In time, she teaches Soonie's great grandmother to sew quilts that along with the moon guide a number of slaves who escape the plantation in their flight toward freedom (see Figure 62). Similar to Sonia's great grandmother, this character's quilt-making showcases the role that quilts played in helping Black slaves to freedom.



*Figure 62.* Illustrated by Hudson Talbott from *Show Way*.

**Ensler.**

Ensler is one of the few male characters who appears in the text. He is featured in one illustration and mentioned briefly when Woodson shares “that Soonie’s great grandma jumped the broom [with him]”(p. 7). He is positioned as victim because he is a slave. However, his marriage to Soonie’s great grandma shows how enslaved Blacks worked to create bonds among themselves under slavery. By briefly weaving in that Soonie’s great grandma and Ensler jumped the broom (which was part of a wedding ceremony among slaves) Woodson and Talbott illustrate that, even though their owners and the laws of the land did not recognize or take them seriously, Black slaves tried to establish formal family units.

**Mathis May, Soonie’s Grandma.**

Living under slavery Mathis May is also positioned as a victim. Similar to her mother, she is also sold away from her family as a child. Talbott illustrates how difficult it must have been for young Mathis May by placing a picture of her with a sad and somber face in the center of a series of images that illustrate the harsh nature of slavery. These images include a slave hunter with their slave hunting dogs, slaves in the fields, the beating of slaves, and runaway slave advertisements (see Figure 63). Some of these images are copies of primary source materials from the time. By including sources, Talbot is drawing on tools that historians often use to support their argument about history. By including images from the past in this illustration, Talbot is providing evidence about just how harsh slavery was for Blacks like Mathis May. While Talbott uses an illustration to show how difficult it must have been for Mathis May, Woodson

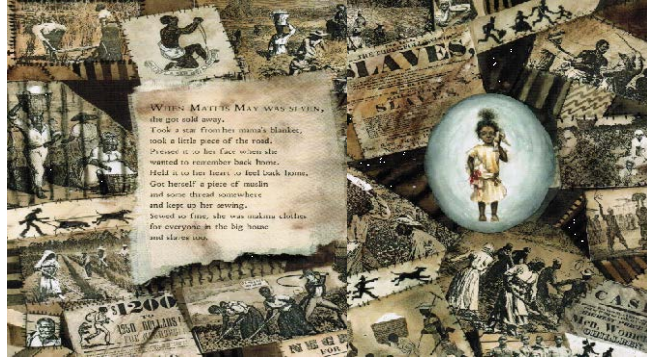


Figure 63. Illustrated by Hudson Talbott from *Show Way*.

uses words to show how she coped with being torn away from her parents. She writes that she “took a star from her mama blanket, took a little piece of the road [and] pressed it to her face when she wanted to remember home. Held it to her heart to feel back home” (p. 9).

After being separated from her family, Mathis May is also positioned as a character who is a resister because she also helps other slaves in the quest to find freedom. Like her mother, she too learns to sew and produces clothing for slaves, and in then time, she makes coded quilts that will provide direction on the Underground Railroad. Woodson maintains that these quilts provided protection against the cold for those absconding slaves who disappeared into the night in search of freedom. Talbott also visually represents Soonie ‘s grandma’s resistance. In one scene Talbott paints Soonie’s grandma making a quilt and in another she is providing a group of Black slaves, who are plotting an escape, with details about the codes on quilt that she has made for them (see Figure 64). After this illustration, Woodson pronounces that “Mathis sure knew how to make a show way” (p. 12).



Figure 64. Illustrated by Hudson Talbott from *Show Way*.

### **Mathis May's Husband.**

Like the character Ensler, Mathis May's husband appears in one illustration and is mentioned briefly. While he is victimized by slavery, he becomes a resister when he runs off. However, this resistance is very short lived as "that slave was killed [while he] was running off to the north side [during the Civil War] (p. 15). His death is depicted as an image that shows Mathis May's husband being shot while he is attempting to go north during the Civil War (see Figure 65).

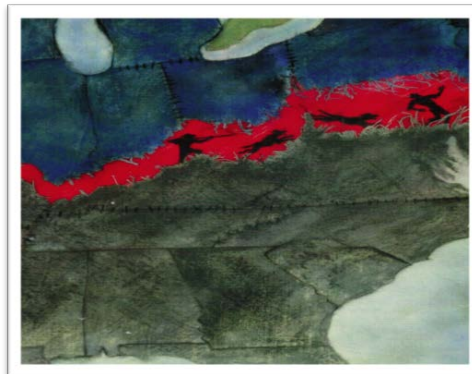


Figure 65. Illustrated by Hudson Talbott from *Show Way*.

### **A Critical Examination of the Representation of Gender, Race, and Class**

*Show Way* foregrounds the strength of Black women. The text pays tribute to Black women whose strength and knowledge illuminate their daughters' lives. Interestingly, this tribute is explicitly illustrated at the beginning of the text with the double-paged



illustration that accompanies the title page. The illustration is of a quilt that contains pictures of twenty Black women who have worked to improve the condition of women and Blacks in the United States. The illustration includes headshots in a quilt of these twenty notable Black female historical figures. Included among them are Harriet Jacobs, Margaret Garner, Mary Prince, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, and Sojourner Truth, the great grandmother character, Black women who resisted and challenged the institution of slavery (see Figure 66). By starting the text with this illustration, which is placed directly above the title *Show Way*, Woodson and Talbott signal to readers that these notable Black women have shown the way to other Black women, like Jacqueline Woodson and her ancestors.

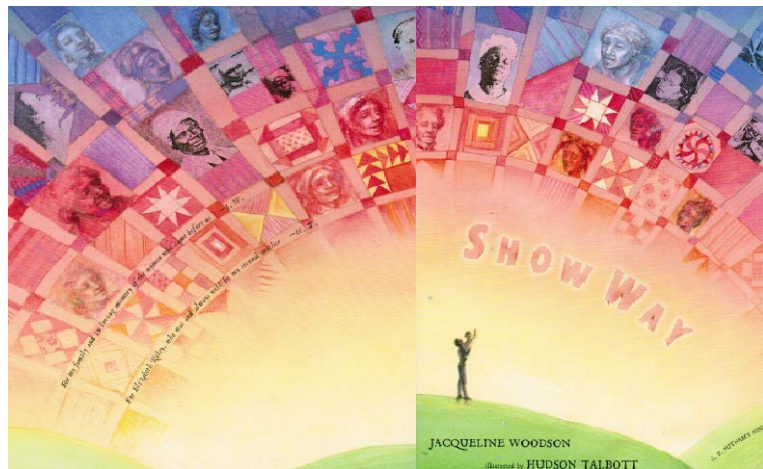


Figure 66. Illustrated by Hudson Talbott from *Show Way*.

Black women are at the center of this narrative because *Show Way* focuses on a tradition called “Show Way” that has been passed down by the women in Jacqueline Woodson's family as a way to remember the past and celebrate the possibilities of the future. In the representation of the four Black women living under slavery that appear in the text, Woodson and Talbot show the courage, strength, and intelligence that they had to endure the oppression that they faced under the institution.



Furthermore, *Show Way* is a text that celebrates these Black women living under slavery. It honors their creativity, resourcefulness and love of life that this line of women passed down from one generation to the next. For instance, Soonie's great grandmother sews quilts that help runaways slaves find their way to freedom. Big Mama is represented as a leader of the slave community who takes care of young children and encourages them not to lose hope. Mathis May, who was sold away from her mother, takes a scrap of her mother's quilt with her and presses it to her heart "to feel back home," but summons her strength and teaches herself to make glorious show ways. The representation of these acts shows that Black women were strong individuals who endure slavery, but also helped others to resist it.

Although Black men are present in the text, they are on the periphery. There are some who appear in the illustrations that show them suffering under slavery (see Figures 58 & 63) and others who are featured planning and then trying to escape (see Figure 61). However, while they are present, it is women who drive or are at the forefront of the narrative about slavery in *Show Way*. Furthermore, the two Black men who are referred to in the story, Ensler and Mathis May's husband, are represented as one-dimensional context characters, the two protagonists' husbands. Readers do not learn much about them beyond the fact that they are slaves, married, and one of them, Mathis May's husband, dies while trying to escape.

White men and women are represented even less than Black men in *Show Way*. White men are pictured in two illustrations and neither group is mentioned in the text. Based on these illustrations (see Figure 63 & 65), White men, who are shown beating, auctioning off, hunting, and overseeing Black slaves, maintain the institution of slavery

by using violence and surveillance. Similar to all the texts featured in this study these White men are represented as the individuals who enact and maintain the institution of slavery. Because *Show Way* does not include representations of Whites as resisters of slavery, the narrative represents White people in a monolithic manner. Based on the narrative put forth in *Show Way* White men were only supporters of slavery and White women were absent from the significant events that took place in Woodson's ancestors lives during slavery.

*Show Way* also represents race in a number of ways. It is another book in my text collection that rejects the assertion that there were kind and paternalistic White slave owner and supporters. The White characters are represented as cruel and violent individuals who were bent on oppressing Black to maintain slavery. White slave owners tear families apart and White slave hunters track down, whip, and even kill Blacks who tried to escape. As noted earlier, there are no White characters in the story represented as allies to Blacks. Instead, all White men represented in *Show Way* support slavery as they carry out cruel acts against Blacks to maintain the institution, as portrayed in one image that features several White men.

Like many of the other Black slave characters in the text collection, throughout the book there are a number of enslaved Black characters who cope with slavery by building community and covert resistance. There are also others who think about, plan for, and attempt to resist slavery through flight. For instance, the Big Mama character works to build community by secretly bringing together the slave children on the plantation to share inspirational stories and encourage them to maintain hope that they will free themselves one day. Sonia's great grandmother and Mathis May sew quilts that guide

runaway slaves in their journey towards freedom. There are also a few representations of Black marriage in the text that provides evidence that Black slaves strove to create families and community.

Overall, *Show Way* can be read as a counter-narrative that strongly challenges the historical claims about the contentment and docility of Black slaves. It can also be read as a text that illustrates the role that oral history can play in discovering the details about the African American past. Here, the written story of the author's personal family history back into the days of slavery Woodson provides a brilliant nod to the oral storytelling tradition and gives voice to Black slaves who were once on the periphery of many of the historical accounts of the peculiar institution.

### **Production Practices of *Heart and Soul: The Story of America and African Americans***

In *Heart and Soul: The Story of American and African Americans*, Kadir Nelson, the illustrator of *Moses: When Harriet Led Her People to Freedom*, again represents the history of Blacks in the slavery through detailed oil paintings. However, with this text Nelson also took on the responsibility of writer to present a survey of African American history that starts with the slave trade and ends with the Civil Rights Movement. With this text, Nelson continues to show that he is committed to writing Blacks into the world of children's literature.

For Nelson, *Heart and Soul: The Story of American and African Americans* helps to fill a void that exists in the body of non-fiction children's texts about the history of the United States. He has shared that he was truly pleased to have had a chance create a text that places African Americans front and center in a historical narrative about the United States because "we don't get a lot of [that] in our schooling" (Nelson, 2011) To Nelson,

the book can play a role in helping a young generation of readers acknowledge the importance of African American history (Nelson, 2011). He notes that the book can also show young readers that “this country is made up of different people whose stories are intertwined in a tapestry of history that is uniquely American” (Nelson, 2011).

In sharing his thoughts about what his text can do in the world, Nelson is communicating his belief in the power of storytelling. One can surmise from his comments that *Heart and Soul: The Story of American and African Americans* can be read as a counter-narrative that challenges dominant stories about the past that appear in other non-fiction history texts written for children. In other words, instead of recounting the past in a manner that privileges Whites, his text primarily focuses on the history of African Americans in the United States.

*Children’s Literature* reviewer Sharon Salluzo (2011) agrees with this perspective. She has written that through *Heart and Soul: The Story of American and African Americans* Nelson “conveys that African Americans have not been on the periphery of American history, but rather have been an integral and important part of it” (p. 25). Salluzo also points out that the text is excellent for young readers because it depicts the history of African Americans succinctly and informatively. Moreover, she writes that because it represents history in a manner that “feels fresh and helps the past come alive” (p. 31), it is an excellent resource for classrooms that are inquiring into the past.

Elizabeth Bush (2011), Suzanne Osman (2012), and the late Walter Dean Myers (2011) have also commented about the text being an excellent read for students learning about the history of the United States. Myers wrote that it is a special text because of its representation of Blacks in United States history and noted it that would be a welcome

addition to both personal and public libraries. Bush and Osman agree. They believe that the book should be an essential addition to any American history classroom resource collection.

Bush's beliefs stem from the fact that she believes the text's powerful images and "narration that spins out smooth as silk [make it] more compellingly than any Social Studies textbook" (p. 27). She also asserts that because of Nelson's monumental oil paintings, which portray many heroic figures from African American history, there is ample reward in the book for school-aged children who do not particularly enjoy reading history books. She adds that the timeline, bibliography, and index can support students' research.

Osman has also shared the reason she believes the text would be a welcomed addition to classrooms where students are engaged in the study of the history of the United States. She writes that it would be an excellent book to share with teens because of its stunning pictures. Osman also thinks that the "straightforward yet powerful presentation of the historical details in the text could certainly cure many students of historical apathy" (p. 52).

*Heart and Soul: The Story of American and African Americans* consists of 112 pages and is constructed in a traditional picture-book format. Throughout the book there is alternating full pages of words and full pages of images. It is divided into twelve chapters that weave the painful histories and achievements of Blacks in the United States since the 1600s. The twelve chapter headings and quotes were carefully chosen because they frame the chapters and can be resources for discussion about a particular aspect or period in African American history. The chapters include: "Declaration of

Independence," "Lincoln's War," "Black Innovation," and the final chapter is called "Revolution." A Prologue, Timeline, Epilogue, and bibliography round out the book and provide some cohesion and context the overall history of Blacks in the United States. The book is classified for upper elementary, middle, and high school students.

*Heart and Soul: The Story of America and African Americans* has won a significant number of awards and honors. In 2012, it won the Jane Addams Children's Book Award, the Coretta Scott King Illustrator and Author Awards, the Society of Illustrators Original Art Award, and the Orbis Pictus Award for Outstanding Non-Fiction for Children. It also landed on the Best Book lists in 2012 for the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Booklist*, *Choices*, *Horn Book*, *School Library Journal*, and *Publisher's Weekly*.

### **Summary of *Heart and Soul: The Story of America and African Americans***

*Heart and Soul: The Story of America and African Americans* is a story of African American history. It is told from the viewpoint of an unnamed fictional narrator, who recounts this historical narrative in an informal voice of an African American elderly woman looking back on her life and remembering what her elders told her about the past. Using the unnamed female narrator, Nelson fashions a unique mode of storytelling that is historical, political, and personal. Throughout the text the unnamed narrator guides readers through major events in African American history from the colonial period to the Civil Rights Movement. The book starts with the history of the slave trade. Then, the narrator describes how Blacks fought in the American Revolution for their own freedom and to help free America from England. After this, the narrator shares details about the horrendous conditions of slavery, Harriet Tubman's heroism, the Civil War, Reconstruction, the Ku Klux Klan. Then the text continues with historical narratives that

focus on the Great Migration, Duke Ellington, Joe Louis, the Tuskegee Airmen, and the Jim Crow laws. To conclude, the book focuses on the Civil Rights Movement and President Lyndon Johnson's signing of the Civil Rights Act into law in 1964.

As with any children's book illustrated by Nelson, the accompanying illustrations are bold and arresting. The dramatic paintings presented in the text contribute greatly to the story, whether they are of well-known historical figures, common folk or the landscape. Nelson's full-bleed paintings portray laborers, soldiers, activists, families as well as heroic figures such as Louis Armstrong, Frederick Douglass, Langston Hughes, Harriet Tubman, King Jackie Robinson, Martin Luther King, and Rosa Parks.

### **Exercise of Power Among Characters**

*Heart and Soul: The Story of American and African Americans* is told from a third-person point of view. In the story, an unnamed narrator reports what the characters featured in the narrative know, think, feel, and observe. Similar to all the other books in my text collection *Heart and Soul: The Story of American and African Americans* foregrounds the voice and the perspectives of the Black characters. In the text it is the unnamed narrator, an elderly African American woman, who recounts the historical narrative throughout the text. The narrator is a repository who is charged with the responsibility of preserving and recounting the history of African Americans. Because she is relating her life and remembering what her elders shared with her about the past, Nelson makes it clear in this text is a recollection of the American past from an African American perspective. He is foregrounding a Black voice because as he puts it, "such a thing has rarely been done" (Nelson, 2011) in non-fiction survey history texts for young readers.

Through the unnamed narrator Nelson is also affirming the importance of the oral tradition in discovering details about the historical past. It is one way that Blacks shared information about life under slavery from generation to generation. Because many Black slaves were not legally allowed to read or write during the antebellum period they could not document these histories through written text. To compensate for this constraint, they passed down their experiences orally. Nelson's use of an unnamed storyteller to recount the slave past illustrates how the Blacks may have circulated narratives about the institution. In this picture book, which surveys the history of Blacks in the United States, Kadir Nelson includes four chapters that present details about a number of Black slaves who toiled under, fought against, and tried to escape slavery. In the text, the unnamed narrator draws on oral tradition to communicate details about the slave past that her ancestors experienced and witnessed. Using an unnamed female narrator, Nelson fashions a unique mode of storytelling that is historical, political, and personal.

#### **The Unnamed Narrator.**

The unnamed narrator is briefly introduced in the prologue of *Heart and Soul: The Story America and African Americans*. Similar to the archeologists who appear in *I Lay My Stitches Down Poems from American Slavery* this character is positioned with agency, who, as the narrator in the text, will share the history of Blacks who lived in slavery in the United States because "it is important" (p. 7). In other words, the agency of the unnamed narrator comes from her storytelling. In sharing stories about the slave past, the unnamed narrator is providing readers with a counter-narrative that places the experience of Black slaves at the center of a history about the antebellum past instead of on the margins. Through the unnamed narrator Nelson reconstructs the history through



the acts of Black slaves rather than from the perspective of dominant White social classes who may have documented this past in texts that foregrounded their experiences. Nelson positions this character with a form of agency that allows her to challenge, respond, and contribute additional perspectives to the extensive body of narratives found in the historiography of slavery that emphasize White or European perspectives. In the prologue of *Heart and Soul: The Story America and African Americans*, Nelson also writes about influence that he believes that the stories that are shared by his unnamed narrator will have on young members of the Black community. He notes she will share stories that show that our history “is chock-full of things . . . that will make you proud, or even laugh a little, and will [help you recognize] that you have to know where you come from so you can move forward” (p. 7). Nelson explains that the narrator represents important matriarchs in the African American community “with roots in their family tree that extend throughout out American history” (Nelson, 2011). Because of her intimate knowledge of the past she can share details about the history of the United States from the African American perspective” (Nelson, 2011).

The visual representation of the unnamed narrator also helps to position her as a prominent character. She is introduced in the same manner that the Sojourner and Harriet Tubman characters are in *Sojourner’s Step-Stomp and Stride* and *Moses: When Harriet Led Her People to Freedom*. Nelson begins *Heart and Soul: The Story of America and African Americans* with a full-bleed childhood portrait of the unnamed narrator. Similar to antebellum slave narratives of the past, it appears that Nelson begins the text in this way as to signal to the reader that the Black person in the portrait is the one who will be representing the historical narrative featured in the text.

Again, this framing device signals to the reader that it is the voice of the person who is represented in the portrait that will be prominent in the pages within the book. In other words, beginning the text with a portrait of unnamed narrator propels her into a prominent place in the story. Furthermore, by painting her with a stoic facial expression and placing her within a circular frame (see Figure 67), Nelson signals that the character is content, secure, and strong. Nelson also paints her in a “white Sunday dress, hair ribbon, and with pearl around her neck to get readers to see her beauty and grace” (Nelson, 2011). Her white dress, placement of her hands, her countenance, and her position on the page seem to suggest that she is positive, open, and inquisitive. The portrait plays a role casting the narrator as someone who can be trusted to share the intimate truths about the past. It also is the first in a selection of portraits in the books that as Elizabeth Bush (2011) has noted “are so beautiful that they can impart pride in African American heritage.”



Figure 67. Illustrated by Kadir Nelson from *Heart and Soul*.

Overall, Nelson uses the narrator to show the important role that African American storytellers play as historians of the community. Because Nelson believes that more non-fiction history texts are needed in this country, his narrator recounts stories of her ancestors in *Heart and Soul: The Story of America and African Americans*.

### **Black Revolutionary War Soldier.**

In the first chapter, which is titled “Declaration of Independence”, a Black revolutionary soldier is introduced who is first positioned as victim because he is a slave and then as a resister when he joins the British Army during the American Revolution in an attempt to gain his freedom. Nelson uses this character to represent the experiences of Blacks who escaped slavery and joined the British army with the hope that the act would help them gain their freedom. In the section of the chapter that focuses on the Black Revolutionary War soldier, the unnamed narrator shares that the British had promised freedom to any slave who fought for them. She states in an informal voice, “honey that was a powerful thing to tell a slave – so thousands of them joined the British” (p. 10).

Using the Black Revolutionary War soldier character Nelson illustrates another way that Blacks attempted to challenge slavery. Like many of the other writers featured in this study by including this character in his text, Nelson presents a character who questions the notion that Black slaves were content with their plight in slavery. By sharing that the Black Revolutionary War soldier was willing to take up arms in to change his condition as a slave the unnamed narrator communicates the length that enslaved Blacks were willing to resist their condition as victims under slavery.

Nelson’s full-bleed illustration of the Black Revolutionary War soldier also helps to convey this assertion. The centered close-up portrait of the character with a determined look upon his face and a musket in his hand informs readers of his firm commitment to resisting slavery by any means necessary (see Figure 68). His centered position, high



Figure 68. Illustrated by Kadir Nelson from *Heart and Soul*.

on the page, and the resolute look upon his face help render the character as someone with much determination and strength. The warm color palette of the painting also signals a level of caution that the character has in taking on the difficult and dangerous task of joining a war to gain his freedom.

To Nelson, painting the portraits in the text in this manner was one way he “tried to show their inner strength and determination” (Nelson, 2011). To Nelson his painting of Black revolutionary character is also important because it is “an image from American history that we’ve never seen” (Nelson, 2011). By sharing this character’s story, Nelson clearly carries through on his commitment to represent details about the American past that have rarely made it into non-fiction history texts for children.

### **George Washington.**

A George Washington character is also represented in Chapter 1. In the section that focus on his life as an army general and president during the late 1700s, he is rendered in a dominant position and his racist beliefs lead to the oppression and denial of opportunities for many Blacks. The section about Washington clearly represents him as an individual firmly committed to the oppression of Blacks by way of the institution of

slavery. It is a representation that runs counter to how Washington is represented in many non-fiction texts for young readers. In *Heart and Soul: The Story of America and African Americans* Washington is not cast as the usual courageous and determined war hero and president who fought for the freedom and justice against tyranny and oppression. Instead, Nelson shines a spotlight on him as the only major slave owner among the seven *Founding Fathers*. Nelson renders Washington as a man who is determined to make sure that Blacks remained in subservient positions, because as a wealthy White slave owner their enslavement helps him to maintain his dominant position in society.

The narrator shares that “George Washington, who was in charge of the American troops, didn’t allow Black folks in the army because he didn’t think it was a good idea to put guns in the hands of folks who might well use them against their masters or other White folks.” (p. 10). She also adds that when “Washington was made the very first president and a new country [based on freedom] was born . . . we were stuck in a country that kept most of us as slaves.” (p. 13). In sharing these details the narrator communicates that as a slave owner and wealthy planter Washington was committed to keeping Black enslaved and signals to readers that there was hypocrisy in the founding of this country. Although slavery violated the core American revolutionary ideals of liberty, freedom, and inalienable rights, men like President Washington still owned human beings as if they were livestock.

The painting that accompanies the section about George Washington also supports his dominant position in the text and illustrates his ease and contentment with a system that oppresses other humans because of their race. In the full-bleed painting that is titled “George Washington and a Slave, Mount Vernon, Virginia,” the first president sits on

high atop a horse with his Black manservant on his side. Washington's head is held high as he looks proudly out onto his property while his manservant's head is cast low with a somber look upon his face (see Figure 69). In this illustration "the reader is positioned i



*Figure 69.* Illustration by Kadir Nelson from *Heart and Soul*.

a field with the first president sitting high on his horse and proud of his achievement" (Nelson, 2011). This part of the illustration aligns readers with the beneficiaries of the freedoms associated with the Declaration of Independence. Washington is pictured as a man who is confident, secure, and free, dominant, and content with the institution of slavery. His high position upon his horse and the existence of sunlight upon his proud face that is held high, while his slave stands with lowered head in the darkness, strongly signals to readers this difference in social position. Washington's dominance over his slave is palpable in the painting.

#### **George Washington's Man Servant.**

As noted early in a previous section, George Washington's slave is also a character who is portrayed in Chapter 1 of Nelson's text. Although he is only referenced in a caption that accompanies the illustration, Nelson's visual rendering of the character makes his position as victim clear. His position in the painting illustrates his low position in society (see Figure 69). It clearly illustrates that he is beholden to Washington and not

totally content with his current position. His somber face signals to readers that he is in low spirits and that he exists in an unfavorable social status as Washington's slave. His unfavorable social status is also represented by his position on the page. While Washington sits high atop a horse with his head held high, the slave stands lower on the page with his head in a downcast position. Nelson also uses lighting in the painting to represent the different status of both men. There is light glinting off Washington's face, while the Black slave stands in the shadow next to him. For Nelson, the painting seeks to clearly represent the hypocrisy of life in the early republic. "The painting of [George Washington's] slave servant represents a Black man who is wondering what his plight and that of his ancestors will be in a land where all men are supposedly free. Though he quietly standing at his master's side, he is probably not content with his plight in the supposed land of the free" (Nelson, 2011).

### **Pap.**

In Chapter 2 of *Heart and Soul: The Story America and African Americans*, which focuses on slavery, a Black character named Pap is featured as the central character in this part of the text. In the chapter the character is positioned as a victim. Nelson shows that Pap lived under a system where he had no voice, made no decisions, and was totally controlled by his master. Throughout the chapter the narrator shares how Pap was victimized under the system of slavery by recounting many of the cruel and oppressive incidents that he faced and suffered under because he was a slave. The account in the text of Pap's life begins with details about his life at a young boy. In recounting Pap's youth, the unnamed narrator shares that "Pap was the only African-born slave in the family" (p. 15) and notes that he was captured when he was only six years old and brought to

America.” (p. 15). Then, she shares exactly what Pap told them about the incident, which is represented in quotes. It reads:

When I was a child, I would play with all de other children in my village while de grown folk were working far away in the fields. They told us to look out for kidnappers ‘cause dey were stories of people who went missing children left home during the day. One day when de grown folks were going out in the field, several of dos people ran into de village carrying nets and clubs an grabbed me and several other children ‘fore they cry out. Dey covered our mouths tied our hands, and ran off with us in the woods. (p. 18)

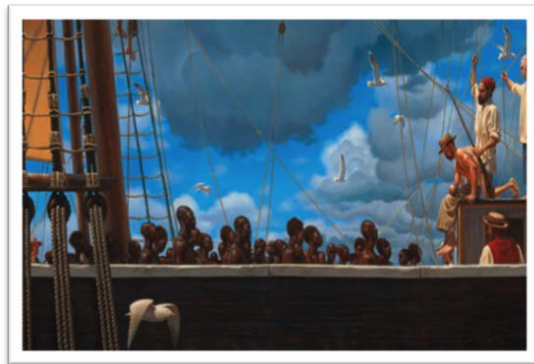
By presenting Pap’s words as he shared them with the narrator, Nelson is signaling the importance of oral history in discovering details about the slavery from the Black perspective. He is illustrating that Blacks who suffered under slavery communicated their experiences under the institution by sharing them orally with one other. Instead of writing down their experiences, they spoke about them. In essence, by featuring the character’s recollections of his kidnapping from Africa into slavery, Nelson shows how African Americans have long relied on the oral tradition to preserve a record of their past.

After the representation of Pap’s kidnapping, the unnamed narrator goes on to share more about details about the character’s kidnapping and his initial days in slavery. She notes that “the children were marched for miles all the way to the coast where a large ship sat out on the water” (p.18), She then recounts what the infamous Middle Passage was like for Pap and the other Africans. After being transported by small boat to the large ship, “African men, women, and children [like Pap] were packed like fish below the deck [and] chained together and crammed into spaces so tight that they could not stand up. It was dark and the air was heavy with the smell of sickness from women and children.” (p. 18). Nelson allows the narrator to share these explicit details because he believes it important for young reader to know that the history of the America is filled with things



“that make you cringe or feel angry.” (p. 7). Although scholars like Rudine Sims Bishop (2007) and Paula Connolly (2003) have noted that most picture books have shied away from explicitly representing the cruel nature of slavery that is not the case here. By vividly representing the experiences of enslaved Blacks during the Middle Passage, Nelson is clearly showing the brutal and bitter nature of the slave trade and slavery.

Nelson also takes it further in illustrating the harsh conditions that Pap suffered under during the Middle Passage by incorporating a full bleed double-page illustration that is titled “Slave ship.” The painting shows enslaved Blacks who are manacled and crowded on the deck of a ship (See Figure 70). It powerfully represents the horror and oppression of the Middle Passage in a number of ways. In the painting, the low status of the enslaved Africans is clear. They sit on the deck below three White slave traders who are looking down upon them with scornful looks upon their faces. It is clear from the painting that they are at the mercy of these men. Nelson places three of the White slave



*Figure 70. Illustration by Kadir Nelson from Heart and Soul.*

traders higher on the page than the Africans and paints them with pistols in their hands to illustrate the power and high status in the situation. Additionally, by representing the many of enslaved Africans with manacles around their necks, somber faces, and downturned heads, Nelson shows their low status and low spirits, and that they are in a

very precarious position. The intense saturated blue sky that is the backdrop of the image also adds to the intensity in the look of all the characters.

After recounting the Middle Passage experience, the narrator continues to share details about Pap's life in slavery, noting that he "was sold to a planter in Maryland as a playmate for his son, [then] at the age of seven he was sent out to work as a field hand." (p. 18). Then, she discloses the difficulty he faced in fields and on the plantation. She explains:

I could tell you about the life do a slave all day long, but even then you couldn't guess the awfulness of it. Slaves are people who are property of other people and must do whatever they are told. They are bought and sold as one would buy and sell any animal or things Slaves has no right to property, to family, to come and go as they pleased, to read or write, or to speak their own language, or have a last name no right to protect themselves- no more rights than that of a horse or pig. The only right a slave had was to work for his master. And work he did. Every morning the slave driver blew the work horn and or rang a bell; and slaves woke up grabbed a hoe and headed out into the fields . . . [as they worked] the air was hot heavy, and full of mosquitoes. (p. 18)

In representing the difficulty that Pap and the other slaves faced on the plantation, again Nelson clearly illustrates the oppression and cruelty that Blacks faced in slavery. However, similarly to Michele Wood and Cynthia Grady in *I Lay My Stitches Down: Poems of American Slavery*, Nelson also uses the narrative that focuses on Pap to show the various ways that enslaved Blacks contended with their dehumanizing experiences and living conditions. To illustrate this, the narrator shares that "slaves sang to keep time with other and to help ease the hard work [and that] singing spirituals, which was born right in the field, was the only way to keep you from dying inside." (p.18). She also notes that to "ease the trouble of their hard lives, the slaves got together and danced on Saturday evenings, [and on most] other evenings they slipped off into the woods for prayer meetings [where they would] pray for the day that freedom would come." (p. 21).

It is through the sharing of these details that Nelson shows that Black slaves were not simply helpless victims. The details show that although they were bound to the plantation, they coped with the harsh life under slavery through community connection and covert resistance.

Nelson also uses a full-page painting of young Pap, which accompanies the narrative about his experience on the plantation in Maryland, to show the strength of enslaved Blacks (see Figure 71). According to Nelson, the painting seeks to convey the



*Figure 71. Illustration by Kadir Nelson from Heart and Soul.*

power of the Black slaves. He notes that, “we’ve seen pictures of certainly children who were slaves [in books] before but not with that much power or presence” (Nelson 2012). Through the painting Nelson attempts to “show that even though he was a slave he had inner strength” (Nelson, 2011). He seeks to achieve this by painting him with an intense gaze upon his face and positioning him in the center of the page so that it appears that we are looking up at him.

For Nelson, the positioning of Pap is also an attempt to create a sense of intimacy between the reader and the character so that the reader can look at the image and think, “Oh, so that’s what people looked like in the nineteenth century. That’s what a slave looked like. Pap looks like an individual” (Nelson, 2011). The intense gaze on young

Pap's face also seeks to show that boy is determined to survive his life on the plantation, which is represented by the quarters behind him. The intense, saturated, blue sky also adds to the intensity of Pap's gaze. Through this image it is clear the young Pap will try his best to survive the horrors of slavery.

Because of the genre, Nelson is afforded with the opportunity to represent more written details about the experience of Blacks in slavery than any other book in the text collection. Because it is a non-fiction survey text, Nelson uses a chapter to recount many details about Pap's enslavement. He embraces the informational nature of such texts by allowing the narrator to describe, inform, and explain many aspects of Pap's life as a slave.

#### **Slave Driver and Overseer.**

A slave driver and overseer are incorporated into narrative about Pap that is presented in Chapter 2. They are positioned from a place of collusion. In the narrative they collude with the slave master to keep Blacks in slavery because they benefit from the institution. These characters represent the group of White supporters of slavery who made sure slaves worked hard and knew their place under the slave system. They show that there was a group of Whites who made a living by managing Black slaves on their employer's plantation. In the text the narrator shares the various ways the slave driver and overseer colluded with the slave master to maintain the institution of slavery. Nelson notes that it was the slave driver who managed their work in their field by "blowing the work horn or ring[ing] the bell"(p. 18) and that "they were watched over by the overseer, who rode around on a horse making sure that everybody was doing their work" (p. 21).

Nelson also recounts the various ways that the slave driver and the overseer made

sure that Pap on the other slaves on the plantation worked hard and knew their place. She reports that “to keep slave in line, [the overseer] lashed them with a curling’ bullwhip [that] he kept on his shoulder [and that he sometimes] tied ‘em to a to a tree and whipped in front of the other field hands.” (p. 21). To convey the cruelty of this act the unnamed narrator goes on to say that, “folks a mile away could hear them awful whippings.” (p. 21). Nelson’s representation of these characters also helps readers consider how class may have shaped the experience of Whites during slavery. The slave driver and the overseer have to perform the difficult task of overseeing the slave population because they are not wealthy enough to have their own slaves. Because they do not own slaves, they make their living working hard to maintain the institution of the slave master who has hired them.

#### **The Planter and his Missus.**

Master and Missus are characters who also appear in Chapter 2. The planter is positioned in a dominant position because he owns all the slaves on the plantation. In telling the story about Pap’s life as a slave, the narrator shares that Pap was initially “sold to [the planter] . . . as a playmate for his son.” (p. 18). Then she recounts that, “once he “reached the age of seven [the planter] sent Pap out to work as a field hand” (p.18) where he is managed by the slave driver and the overseer. In *Heart and Soul: The Story America and African Americans* the planter serves as symbol for White men who were wealthy enough to buy Black slaves and to hire other White men to manage them. Similar to the slave driver and overseer, their presence in the text cause readers to consider how class shaped slavery. The planter represents the small number of White men who held most of the South’s wealth, managed large plantation enterprises, and set the tone in economic

and social life. They were in a place of dominance because of their wealth, property, and prominence during the antebellum period.

As the wife of the planter, the Missus character is also in a place of dominance in the text. The narrator recounts that house slaves “worked under the watchful eye of the Missus, cooking, cleaning, sewing, even nursing the Missus children they needed milk [and rearing] all three of the Missus children.” (p. 21). By including the plantation mistress, Nelson genders his representation of slavery. The inclusion of the plantation mistress causes the readers to consider how class and gender shaped the life of White women during the antebellum period. As the wife of a planter, the Missus character is in a place of dominance because of her husband’s position in society. However, because of her gender she has a role to play; she is in charge of the plantation household. In Nelson’s text the plantation Missus serves as a symbol for the wives of wealthy planters who were in charge of overseeing the house, food, linens, cleaning, clothing, caretaking of her family, and the house slaves.

### **Aunt Hattie.**

Nelson also introduces another specific slave character named Aunt Hattie in Chapter 2. Like Pap she is positioned as a victim as she suffers under slavery on the White planter’s plantation. In the paragraph that Nelson dedicates to detailing her plight, readers learn from the narrator that she treated Pap like family and worked in the Big House. The narrator shares that in the Big House Aunt Hattie faced oppression and harsh treatment that was similar to that of slaves who worked in the fields. She recounts that she “worked all day under the watchful eye of the Missus, cooking, cleaning, sewing, and even nursing the Missus children when they needed milk.” (p. 21). Similarly to the

female character who is represented in the poem “Broken Dishes” in *I Lay My Stitches Down: Poems of American Slavery*, Aunt Hattie shows the oppression that house slaves faced under constant, watchful eye of their plantation mistresses. The inclusion of Aunt Hattie also genders Nelson’s representation of slave life on the plantation. Through the character, Nelson represents that the domestic work on a plantation was the responsibility of female slaves.

### **Frederick Douglass.**

In Chapter 3 of *Heart and Soul: The Story of African Americans*, which is titled “Abolition,” a Frederick Douglass character is introduced to represent the overt ways that Black slaves resisted slavery. He is initially positioned as a victim because he is a slave who lives alongside Pap on the White planter’s plantation. However, in time he begins to challenge the institution of slavery in covert ways and then eventually to resist slavery by running away to Massachusetts. With words and a full-page portrait Nelson renders Frederick Douglass as a courageous and strong Black man who is determined to resist and challenge slavery.

In detailing Douglass’ act of resistance against slavery, first, the narrator recounts an act of covert resistance by noting how Douglass secretly “taught himself to read, which was very dangerous, because if White folks found out, he would get a sound licking.” (p. 24). Then, she shares “that [he] ran away to Massachusetts, where he became a great speaker, talking to large crowds of White folks about how terrible it was to be a slave.” (p. 24). She also notes that he wrote a narrative about his life that made him very famous” (p. 24) and was used as part of a plan to try to end slavery that was being carried out by abolitionists. She describes that Douglass felt that “preaching [and sharing

narratives] about the awfulness of slavery was the best way to fight it.” (p. 24).

In essence, through the narrative shared by the narrator, Nelson’s Frederick Douglass is rendered as a smart and courageous resister who challenges the system of slavery by escaping and then speaking out against it. Nelson also uses the Douglass character to share the ways that literacy played a role in the fight against slavery. Because Douglass learned to read and write he was able to write a slave narrative, which communicated the cruel nature of slavery. Such texts were used as part of the abolitionists’ plan to end slavery. Through the narrative about Douglass readers learn that Blacks were not content with slavery and that “free Blacks, former slaves [like Douglass], and good White folks were speaking up about the need to end slavery.” (p. 24).

Nelson also incorporates a bold full bleed portrait painting of Frederick Douglass to show the strength and power of a man who was a central part of the abolitionist movement (see Figure 72). In the painting Nelson visually presents a young Frederick Douglass who looks skyward as he prepares to board his train to freedom. In 1838, Douglass escaped from the antebellum South by train by cleverly disguising himself



*Figure 72.* Illustration by Kadir Nelson from *Heart and Soul*.



as a sailor on his way North. By painting Douglass with a serious visage, centering him on the page, and adorning him in a bright red sailor shirt, Nelson depicts the inner strength, determination, and fiery character of a freedom fighter who would go on to help change the course of history. The sky helps tell the story. Like the painting of young Pap, the intense saturated blue sky compliments the intensity of the young Frederick Douglass and adds some serenity to the image.

### **Harriet Tubman.**

Harriet Tubman is also positioned as a character who resists slavery with words and her work on the Underground Railroad. Nelson allows the unnamed narrator to share that like Douglass, Harriet attempted to strike a blow against slavery by traveling around and sharing the horrors of slavery with those who would listen, with the hope that they would join her as a resister in the fight to bring an end to the institution. She recounts that “Harriet Tubman [worked] to help slaves to escape North by way of the Underground Railroad” (p. 24) and that [like Douglass] she “preached about the awfulness of slavery [as] one way . . . to fight it.” (p. 24). Furthermore, she was so effective at spreading this gospel that it “lit a fire inside many a slave to take their freedom” (p. 24).

Nelson also presents a full-page portrait painting of a stern-faced Tubman standing with a staff in hand to represent the inner strength, confidence, and, determination of the character. In the full bleed illustration, Sojourner is centered on the page with an intense gaze that seems to signal that she is keenly aware of her surroundings (see Figure 73). Her countenance, coupled with a dark yellowish colored sky and an apparently evening setting, seems to signal that Harriet had to proceed with caution in her fight to help others resist the institution of slavery through flight.



Figure 73. Illustration by Kadir Nelson from *Heart and Soul*.

### **Critical Examination of the Representation of Gender, Race, and Class**

Like a number of the other neo-slave narratives included in this study, *Heart and Soul: The Story of America and African Americans* presents female characters who suffered under and resisted slavery. Like *Sojourner Truth's Step-Stomp and Stride* and *Moses: When Harriet Led Her People to Freedom, I Lay My Stitches Down: Poems of American Slavery, January's Sparrow, and Show Way* at times incorporated women into the narrative that each presents about slavery. Although there is a small cast of female characters who are featured in the text, it can certainly be considered a book that represents aspects of both the Black and White female experience in slavery. Using the Aunt Hattie, Harriet Tubman, and Missus characters, Nelson shows the various ways the women endured under the institution.

Through the narrative about Aunt Hattie, the house slave, Nelson genders his representation of slavery. In sharing details about what work was like for Aunt Hattie within the plantation household, Nelson foregrounds the gender-specific tasks that Black female slaves were responsible for under slavery. In the text, Nelson shares that Aunt Hattie “worked all day, cooking, cleaning, sewing, and even nursing the [plantation mistresses] children when they needed milk.” (p. 21). Because there are no male

characters represented who are doing this type of work in the text, in Nelson's representation of slavery, Black women are responsible for these domestic tasks. Nelson also uses the planter's wife, Missus, to signal that domestic tasks were the responsibility of women. In the story, although Missus does not do any of the physical work because of her class status as a wealthy planter's wife, she is responsible for overseeing it. It is under her "watchful eye" (p. 21) that the work was supervised.

By including these two characters Nelson cast women living under slavery as the ones primarily responsible for the domestic spaces during that time. Additionally, because they are the ones who take care of the children, women in the text can be viewed as also warm, sentimental, and nurturing. Furthermore, similarly, while it is not through these two characters, Nelson also casts women in a similar manner when he allows the unnamed character to recount the Middle Passage experience. When she states that below deck "was dark and the air was heavy with the smells of sickness and the cries of men and women" (p. 18), Nelson is also recasting the assertion of women as the domesticated and weaker sex. In this section of the text about the Middle Passage, although Nelson makes it clear through image and text that Black men were also below deck during the Middle Passage, the unnamed narrator share that it is only women and children who cry. The line in the context of the narrative makes it appear that men endured the chains, cramped conditions, heavy air, and the smell of sickness without shedding a tear, while the women cried like children because of the circumstances. This representation certainly makes it seem that Black women were not as strong as Black men.

However, Nelson balances this representation of Black women by way of Harriet Tubman. In the text Harriet Tubman is shown to be a strong and determined woman who

is willing to put herself in danger's way to help others resist and challenge the institution of slavery. Unlike Aunt Hattie, Harriet Tubman's primary responsibility is not about attending to domestic responsibilities; instead, as a resister and social justice activist it is her responsibility in the world is to bring an end to the ugly system of slavery by any means necessary.

Similarly, half of the central Black male characters in *Heart and Soul: The Story of America and African Americans* are also represented in this manner. Both Frederick Douglass and the Black Revolutionary War soldier are represented as strong, courageous, determined individuals who will stop at nothing to resist and challenge the institution of slavery. They are like many of the other Black male characters who appear in picture books featured in this study. They are rendered as freedom fighters working to resist the institution of slavery through flight, fight, and various forms of activism. In contrast, while the other Black male characters in the text do not act overtly, they too are represented as individuals who have strength, courage, and resilient spirits that help them to survive under the cruel oppression of slavery. In the text because of these characteristics Pap and George Washington are used by Nelson to illustrate that Black men carried out covert acts of resistance against slavery and had the inner strength that was necessary to survive the harsh system under which they were treated inhumanely and viewed as property.

The three White characters represented in Nelson's book are represented in a manner that is well in line with most slave masters, overseers, and drivers. Because all are supporters of slavery and willingly maintain the institution through violence and oppression, they can be characterized as cruel. In the story this cruelty is illustrated by

way of the planter buying slaves like Pap and hiring others to maintain a plantation run by slave labor that he benefits from. The slave driver's and the overseer's actions also reveal their cruelty. Unlike the planter, they are the ones who carrying out the cruel acts that help to maintain control of the slaves on the plantation. For example, it is the slave driver and the overseer who is responsible for managing the long work days of the slaves. They violently punish those who attempt to resist or reject their position under slavery.

As noted earlier, it is also important to point out that it is through the different experiences of the planter and the slave driver and overseer that readers can consider how class shaped the experience of White men under slavery. The planter, because of his wealth, can be viewed as the top manager in that he hired other supporters of slavery work on his plantation and bought the slaves. Meanwhile, the slave driver and overseer, who were the hired supporters of slavery, can be viewed as labor supervisors, who saw that tasks were done and no one slacked. Because of their station, these White men were put in a position where they dealt with the animosity and resistance of slaves, but received benefits from the planter, which came as wages, bonuses, special privileges, and a certain degree of prestige.

Through the images and words, Nelson also presents much commentary about race and the history of slavery in the United States in *Heart and Soul: The Story of American and African Americans*. First, Nelson's representation of slavery seeks to give Blacks a voice in the history of the institution that appears in the text. By using an unnamed narrator to tell the history of slavery that appears in the text, a black elderly woman who has drawn on the stories that her ancestors have shared with her, Nelson is allowing his ancestors to share their "stories about the institution" (Nelson, 2011).

By primarily featuring the experiences of African American ancestors from slavery days Nelson provides a counter-narrative to writings about the institution that placed Blacks and their experiences in the periphery. In the text, what readers discover about Black slaves comes from a Black narrator who has learned about the institution through oral history. By constructing the book in this manner, Nelson is using storytelling to name the African American experience in slavery from their perspective and to illuminate and “show the ironic nature of the history of a country that was formed with the idea of freedom that still had and supported a large enslaved population.” (Nelson, 2011). Nelson’s representation about how the narrator came to recount the history of slavery is certainly in line with that of historians (Hope Franklin, 1947; Blassingame, 1977) and scholars like W.E. B. Dubois (1935) who asserted that it is important for a history of slavery to deal largely with the slaves and their point of view.

Beyond giving voice to the Black slave Nelson also uses text and image to represent a dramatization of historical arguments about slavery that feature the cruelty, hardship, and hypocrisy of the institution. In Nelson’s chapters about slavery readers can find a dramatization of historical perspectives that have been put forth by a number of historians about the hypocrisy of slavery and the cruel and inhumane nature of the institution. For example, through image and text readers are presented with renowned historian John Hope Franklin’s (1994, 2000) assertions about the harsh nature of slavery and the hypocrisy of the founders of this country who betrayed the ideal they gave lip service to by maintaining such an inhumane system where all men and women certainly were not equal. For example, this assertion is on display in Nelson’s chapter titled “The Declaration of Independence.” According to Nelson, weaving the details about the

revolutionary alongside the oppression of slavery shows the hypocrisy of a nation where Whites maintained legal slavery during a time when the colonists were trying to free themselves from the bonds of England.

Furthermore, in the same chapter Nelson also presents readers with what Betram Brown (1988) has referred to as the mask of obedience. According to Brown, Black slaves often “played unconcerned, [or unaware of their situation] to mask other designs [or thoughts] or to fool the White onlooker.” (p. 1247). To Wyatt-Brown Black male slaves often masked obedience and exhibited nerveless behavior as a method to survive the oppression of slavery. He writes that “to escape the shame, humiliation, [and death], male slaves had to repress emotions and maintain confident behavior under pressure.” (p. 1246). In Nelson’s picture of President Washington and his Black slave servant, readers get a glimpse of Wyatt- Brown’s assertion. In the picture, the manservant certain seems to be illustrated in a manner that conveys the idea that he is drawing on his inner strength to repress his emotions in order to survive the oppression of slavery.

Nelson also challenges proslavery assertions by constructing a text that represents the harsh nature of slavery, the cruel nature of slave master, overseer, and drivers, and the resistance of slaves. In the text, the slave overseer and driver force Black slaves to work from sunup to sundown and brutally punish those who attempt to escape. *Heart and Soul: The Story of American and African Americans* also represents slavery as an institution with discontented, resistant, and determined slaves; in the text Nelson includes details about the tireless work that Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman and “other free Blacks, former slaves, Whites did to help . . . many slaves to escape North by way of the Underground Railroad.” (p. 24). Nelson also, as the late Walter Dean Myers puts it,

depicts his enslaved characters with strength, dignity, and power.

The critical examination of race, class, and gender using the methodological tools used in this dissertation have revealed certain themes regarding the representation of slavery that appears in the picture books featured in my text collection. It also provides insights about the various ways that the methodological approach can be used by classroom teachers who want to examine slavery in depth with their students. In the next section, I write about the common themes that exist in the picture books examined in this study and discuss the implications that this study can have for classroom teachers. I also write about what these texts reveal about the current socio-political climate in the United States.



## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

#### Summary

This study is about exploring new ways to read picture books about slavery. It demonstrates that these texts have not embraced some monolithic version about the history of slavery. Rather, it shows that contemporary picture books about slavery engage with various historical discourses about the institution. It also shows that the discourses about slavery found in children's literature can be defined by multiplicity rather than singularity. This study also reveals how neo-slave narratives written for children take up issues connected to the most noteworthy debates in the historiography of slavery. Furthermore, it serves as an example of a method that can be used to illuminate how class, gender, and race are represented in this sub-genre of children's books.

Additionally, this dissertation demonstrates that children's literature about slavery continues to perform important cultural work, as it always has done. These books engage accessibly, knowledgeably, and imaginatively with specific interpretations and arguments that have been advanced in the discipline of history. The scholarship about neo-slave narratives written for children often suggests that this sub-genre of texts contains radical insights about slavery that rarely appear in the historiography about the topic. However, it is more accurate to assert that the representation of slavery found in neo-slave narratives written for children parallels discourses in the discipline of history.

In fact, all the picture books examined in this study contain representations of slavery that for the most part have grown out of the historiographic shift in slavery studies that began in the 1960s and 1970s. From the late nineteenth century to the mid-

twentieth century the historical studies and literature on slavery, dominated by the analysis of Ulrich B. Phillips, primarily reflect the slave owner's view and portray slavery as a mainly benevolent institution maintained by paternalistic masters. As the historian Herbert Gutman (1976) noted at the beginning of the historiographic shift, previous studies about slavery focused on the question: What did the institution do for the slave? The dominant answer was that slavery lifted the slaves out of the barbarism of Africa, Christianized them, protected them, and, overall, benefited them.

The discourse about the existence of a benevolent and benign slave system is not limited to the South or a small group within the historical profession. The assertion dominated the historiography of the institution for quite some time. In fact, well into the 1950s, notable historians such as Samuel Eliot Morrison from Harvard University and Henry Steele Commager of Columbia University continued to put forth the discourse in one of the most popular college history textbooks of the time, *The Growth of the American Republic* (1939, 1942, 1950, 1962). However, due in part to the long reach of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, change was on the horizon for the historiography of slavery.

In a powerful example of how present event influences the understanding of the past, a growing number of historians began to view slavery more critically. Amidst the Supreme Court's landmark decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Montgomery bus boycott, and other powerful stirrings of civil rights activism, the view of slavery as a benign, civilizing institution for an inferior race started to crumble. Historians began to ask a new question: What did slavery do to the slaves? At first, the research of Kenneth Stampp (1956) and others answered that slavery was above all a harsh and profitable

system. Historians such as Stanley Elkins (1959) argued that it so harsh and all-encompassing that it destroyed slaves' African culture and left them passive and dependent on their masters for their culture and identity.

However, in the 1960s, as the Civil Rights and Black Power movements increasingly emphasized the pride and resilience of Black people in the face of oppression, African American scholars and organizations like the NAACP began to critique previous scholarship about the institution for its racist underpinnings. Historians reviewed the history of slavery again and asked: What did slaves do for themselves? What did they think about slavery? Considering a reinterpretation of old sources and the study of new ones such as interviews of ex-slaves in the 1930s by the Works Progress Administration, the scholarship of the 1960s and 1970s suggested that within the harsh and brutal confines of slavery, Black slaves were resistant and resourceful and that they continuously struggled for a measure of independence, dignity, and freedom. This scholarship also focused on their family life, community and the religion. This body of scholarship is recognized by many who have studied the historiography as a counter-narrative or rebuttal to the earlier studies of slavery that represented the institution as benevolent and benign.

Furthermore, this scholarship has been acknowledged as the spark that led to the historiographic shift in slavery studies. Beginning in the 1960s and 1970s, more and more historians began to focus on the experiences and the perspectives of those who lived under slavery. Instead of portraying slaves as passive objects of oppression, many historians who examined slavery focused their attention on the intricate ways that slaves resisted and dealt with the institution. They also began to keenly focus on the community

and culture they created.

In many ways, the picture books in this study are an outgrowth of this historical scholarship. Taken as a whole, these texts primarily focus on representing slavery from the perspective of the slaves themselves. In these books, their experiences and what they did for themselves and their communities under the oppressive institution drive the narratives. Additionally, in most of the stories Black resistance against slavery is usually a main point of emphasis. Furthermore, similar to many post-1970s historical studies about slavery, these texts can be read as counter-narratives because they challenge the claim of the benevolent and benign institution by including slave owners and slavery supporters who certainly are not represented as helpful or kind.

In the sections that follow, I write about the three major themes that emerged in my analysis of the featured books, offer some suggestions further research, and present how this study may have implications for the classroom. After this, I complete the chapter with a discussion about some sociopolitical implications of this study.

### **Giving Voice**

Similarly to many post 1970 studies about slavery, the children's picture books featured in this study seek to recover the lost voices of Black slaves. While this is done in a number of ways and the level of effectiveness varies, all the picture books in my text collection give voice to the Black slave by constructing narratives that foreground their point of view and experiences. In all of the texts examined in this study, it is the Black slave story that is foregrounded, with readers experiencing slavery from slaves' points of view. Similar to the work of historians like John Blassingame, a Black historian from Yale University who recognized that the voice of the Black slave was absent from the

early historiography of slavery (Yetman, 1984) and therefore sought to privilege it in their research, children's book texts examined in this study do the same by representing the experiences of Black slaves in great detail.

In sharp contrast to studies, stories, and sources that feature or rely on the White voice or view to represent what slavery was like, all the books in this study rely foremost on the perspective of the Black slave to represent details about the peculiar institution. In these books it is primarily the Black slave who represents the institution from his or her point of view. The White slave owners and overseers who are represented remain mostly silent. Furthermore, in all the picture books featured in this study Black slaves are central to the texts, and in all the books the Black voice is explicitly featured.

By foregrounding the Black slave voice in their texts, the creators of the picture books featured in the study present Blacks who lived under slavery as the authority on the institution. Following in the footsteps of historians like Blassingame who represented slavery from the perspective of the slaves themselves in his books, *The New Perspectives on Black Studies* (1971), *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (1972), *Frederick Douglass, the Clarion Voice* (1976), and *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Interviews, and Autobiographies* (1976), the writers and illustrators give voice to the Black slave.

Moreover, because all the texts have been constructed based on research that consists of slave narratives, slave testimony, and historical research that focuses on the experiences of the Black slave, I would argue that the authors and illustrators featured in this study are committed to telling the stories of those who were once silenced because they were slaves. As Martha Cobb (1982) has argued, by featuring the Black voice and

perspective in their neo-slave narratives, writers and illustrators give Black slaves a form of agency that was for the most part unseen in the majority of past narratives about the institution.

Giving voice to the Black slave in their representations of the institution, the creators of the texts featured in this study have pulled those who lived under slavery from the margins to the forefront. In essence, the writers and illustrators featured in this study make a point to “represent the view from the slave quarters rather from the view of the [White master’s] big house.” (p. 251). In these representations of slavery, the Black slave characters give voice to issues related to gender, race, and class. In representing these issues they also challenge the proslavery stereotypes and reject the pre-1960s dominant discourse about the existence of a benevolent and benign slave system.

### **Recasting Racial Violence to Reject Proslavery Stereotypes**

Joining the ever-growing group of historians who have challenged the assertion that White slave owners were kind, supportive, and paternalistic (Blassingame, 1976; Hope Franklin & Schweninger, 2000; Johnson, 1999; Patton Malone, 1996; Tadmán, 1999; Wood, 1996), the writers and illustrators examined in this study have used their fictional texts to make the case that the institution was a cruel, violent, and oppressive institution. None of children’s book writers and illustrators featured in this dissertation shy away from representing slavery as a violent and oppressive system. Their representations of slavery found in the picture books examined in this study challenge the notion that racial violence during slavery times was an aberration. In representing the violent and oppressive nature of slavery, the writers and illustrators of these texts have joined a long line of historians who have continued to challenge the historical discourse of a

paternalistic slave system that was maintained by kind masters.

In challenging the notion that White slave masters were kind and slavery was comfortable for and supportive of Blacks, representations of cruelty enacted upon Black slaves are featured in all the texts. In these books both writers and illustrators challenge the historical discourse that asserts the kind and paternalistic nature of slavery by illustrating by way of image and text the violence and oppression that slaves faced at the hands of their White masters.

In these books instead of the Black slave being cast as aggressive, violent, and cruel, which was a representation that was dominant during slavery times and reconstruction, it is White slave owners and overseers who are constructed using these attributes. In these texts White masters and overseers are represented as individuals who exercised power through domination over Black slaves. In essence, in these neo-slave narratives, the argument that White slave owners were paternalistic and kind is certainly challenged through representations that cast White masters and overseer as cruel and callous individuals who sought to maintain slavery through the dehumanization and oppression of Black slaves.

In the picture books examined for this study, the writers and illustrators depict what John Hope Franklin (1956) called “the violence that was bred out of the daily implementation and protection of human bondage.” (p. 317). They show “what [they consider] slavery was really like instead of what some historians [early on in the historiography of the institution] once imagined it to be.” (Sims Bishop, 2007, p. 151). The writers and illustrators foreground the violence and horror of slavery, not only to challenge the idea that slavery was benevolent and paternalistic, but also to dismiss it.

## **Constructing the Discontented and Determined Black Slave**

The text collection can also be characterized as containing books that engage with the much debated assertion about the existence of a significant number of contented and happy slaves during the antebellum period (Elkins, 1959; Phillips, 1918). All of the books in the text collection explicitly challenge this claim in their representation of slavery by presenting a number of discontented Black slave characters who are determined to find their way to freedom by resisting or rebelling against slavery.

Based on my extensive reading of these picture books about slavery, it appears that the children's texts are in line with a recent trend. Since the 1990s, a significant number of children's texts have been published that challenge the notion that Black slaves were content with their lives as slaves. In these texts, there are narratives about slavery that foreground Black characters continually resisting and rebelling against the institution. For the most part, contemporary children's books that represent slavery often deal with [or foreground] enslaved Blacks' quest for freedom (Rudine Sims Bishop, 2007). Furthermore, in most of these texts the quest ends successfully as most of the stories close with Black slaves successfully escaping slavery and finding freedom.

Many of these books feature the word "freedom" in the title, present a plot that reveals the horrors of slavery, and end with the joy of freedom. Some of these children's books, like *Aunt Harriet's Underground Railroad in the Sky* (1992), *Moses: When Harriet Led Her People to Freedom* (2006), *Minty: A Story of Young Harriet Tubman* (1996), *Henry's Freedom Box* (2007), *Lincoln and Douglass* (2008), *John Brown: His Fight for Freedom* (2009), *Harriet Tubman and the Freedom Train* (2003), *Sojourner Truth: Stomp and Stride* (2009), *When Harriet Met Sojourner* (2008), *Only Passing*



*Through: The Story of Sojourner Truth* (2001), and *A Picture Book of Harriet Tubman* (1992) feature the stories of notable runaway slaves and abolitionists.

While others such as *Next Stop: Freedom: The Story of a Slave Girl* (1991), *Amistad Rising: A Story of Freedom* (1998), *Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt* (1993), *Journey of Freedom: A Story of the Underground Railroad* (1994), *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road* (1998), *The Secret of Freedom* (2001), *I Want To Be Free* (2009), *Underground: Finding the Light To Freedom* (2011), *Freedom's A-Callin Me* (2012), *Night Boat To Freedom* (2006), *Seven Miles to Freedom*, *Freedom River* (2000), *Almost to Freedom* (2003), *Crossing Bok Chitto : A Choctaw tale of Friendship and Freedom* (2006), *Phillis Sings Out Freedom* (2010), *The Patchwork Path: A Quilt Map to Freedom* (2005), *A Good Night For Freedom* (2004), and *Freedom Fruit* (1995) begin with the word “freedom” and focus on escape. Featured in these picture books are narratives about the flight towards freedom that are filled with words and images that reveal the Black slave’s deep desire to be free.

Patricia Connolly (2013) has written about the frequent focus on escape and notes that neo-slave narratives recast and reshape antebellum slave narratives. Connolly writes that contemporary children’s books about slavery recast “moments in antebellum slave narratives.” (p. 202). To Connolly, these books show the wide resistance of slaves, much of which went unnoticed by White masters but predicated escape—from listening in on the master’s conversation and passing that information along to others in the slave community to ferrying people to freedom. She argues that stories that feature such acts are common in neo-slave narrative picture books for young children because they focus on the effectiveness of nonviolent rebellion and show agency. Rudine Sims Bishop

(2009) has also written about the prevalence of children's books about slavery that feature flight. She refers to them as liberation narratives, which are stories about Black slaves' escape towards freedom, and argues that these stories have helped to empower young people by showing them the strength of their enslaved ancestors.

Indeed, the claims made about the neo-slave narratives written for children by Connolly and Sims Bishop can also be said about the texts featured in this study. I would also argue that the books in my text collection can be read as counter- narratives that challenge the assertion of the contented slave by representing Black slaves as determined seekers of freedom. In all the children's books featured in this study, there are primary Black slave characters who crave to be free, and, as demonstrated in the paragraphs above, many of them successfully find their way towards freedom. Again, these representations challenge the historical discourse of the content slave and represent Blacks living under slaves as desperate about and determined to find freedom. These books also serve as excellent examples of children's books that illustrate the historical discourse about the experiences of those Black runaway slaves.

Furthermore, they show that children's literature about slavery plays a role in supplementing and supporting the arguments of historians like Lathan Windley (1983) and John Hope Franklin (1999) who argue that the existence of runaways provides evidence to discount the popular myth that slave were docile and always cowered in the face of White oppression. The representation in neo-slave narrative picture books of discontent slaves who are determined to attempt flight toward freedom reject the representation of the hegemonic power of White slave masters and represent the existence of a community of slaves who seek to resist the institution by attempting to exit

it. Such representations reveal the agency of Blacks during slave times. In essence, the overwhelming majority of writers and illustrators featured in this study have joined the ranks of those who have produced texts that challenge the stereotype that Black slaves were generally content and rarely attempted to run away. The examination of the children's books in my text collection signals that the escape to freedom is often central to the narrative in contemporary stories about slavery. In the end, these texts feature Blacks slaves as discontent and determined to gain freedom in a manner that questions the claim of the contentment.

### **Complicating the Slave Experience**

It is important to note that the construction of the Whites in texts featured in this study goes beyond that of the White overseer and owner and the kind and caring slave owner. In fact, the children's books featured in this study also contain a small number of White characters who are constructed as colluders who assist Blacks in their resistance of slavery. Although the trope of the cruel and violent White slave owner or slavery supporter is used continuously throughout the texts in this study, the text collection also contains a cast of White characters who are represented as resisters helping slaves during their flights towards freedom.

In over half of the children's books featured in this study, there are White characters that are represented as individuals who serve as allies to Black slaves in their escape from bondage. Although these books contain some Whites who are violent and cruel, there are also others who are helpful and kind. In more than half of the texts, there are also Whites who assist Black slaves in various ways in their quest for freedom and independence. These White characters complicate power relations between Black slaves

and White people.

It is important to note, that similar to the representation of Whites, Blacks are not cast in a completely monolithic manner in these texts. Although the overwhelming majority of Black characters seek to exert agency through flight, there are others who are not represented in this manner. In *I Lay My Stitches Down: Poems of American Slavery*, there are some characters who deal with slavery in other ways. In *Night Running: How James Escaped with the His Faithful Dog*, there is even a slave character who reports Levi's plot to escape to the plantation overseers. Additionally, as I have written in Chapter 4, some of the writers and illustrators have also gendered the experience of slavery to illustrate how different experiences that men and women may have had under the institution. Along the same line, some of the creators of these texts also show how gender and class shaped the experiences of Whites as well as Blacks. Although some central themes are reflected in the picture books in my collection, my analysis shows that these texts also represent the diversity of experiences among Blacks and Whites who lived while slavery was legal in the United States.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

This study shows that picture books about slavery engage with and respond to select historical scholarship about the institution. Additionally, it shows that these texts represent various perspectives about race, gender, class, and power. Conducting classroom- and/or community-based research can expand this study. Using the research methods in this study to read and discuss picture books about slavery with students would be worthwhile. It would be valuable to have students use these analytical practices to explore, in social studies classrooms, how representations of slavery in contemporary

picture books connect with the historiography of the institution. It would be informative to explore student responses to the representation of slavery found in contemporary picture books.

Furthermore, it would also be important to examine various ways that teachers use picture books about slavery in their classroom to determine which texts they will use with their students. It might also be interesting to work with a classroom teacher to create a curriculum unit that is based on picture books and young adult novels about slavery. In this unit students might be asked to address issues such as the representation of violence in the texts. They could also review the books in a manner that allows them to explore how they engage with the historiography of slavery.

Additional studies about neo-slave narratives written for children could also be instructional. For example, expanding the amount of neo-slave narratives used in this study might provide insight into how different writers and illustrators take up particular historical discourses about slavery in their fictional representations of slavery with, for instance, a study that explores how a collection of contemporary young adult novels represents slavery and engages with and responds to the historical discourses about the institution. Studies that also focus explicitly on how neo-slave narratives written for children have affected the ways in which the United States has dealt with the memory of slavery could also be valuable. By examining the social, political, and cultural components that contributed to the emergence of a dominant narrative about the existence of runaway slaves in children's literature about slavery published after the 1960s, such studies could reveal the role that the Black Arts, Black Power, and Civil Rights movements played in the formation of these narratives.

## **Pedagogical Implications**

Several implications for classroom teachers, students, and teacher educators can be gleaned from this study. This study urges classroom teachers and teacher educators to use an intertextual approach, juxtaposing historical children's fiction about slavery with specific historical studies about the institution. Specifically, this study can be informative to teachers interested in incorporating fiction into their classrooms or those who are seeking ideas for teaching students about the complexities of the history of slavery in the United States. By exploring how the picture books engage with the historiography of slavery, this study provides insight into how literature can be used to help students develop critical multicultural practices. This study also encourages classroom teachers and teacher educators to use critical multicultural analysis to explore how race, class, gender, and power relations are represented in neo-slave narratives that have been written for children.

When reading these texts, all teachers and students can use a framework that draws upon critical race theory, critical race feminism, critical multicultural analysis, and intertextuality to explore complex power relations that shaped both the past and present. The Black Power, Civil Rights, multicultural education, and other social justice movements have contributed to a continuously growing body of fictional books about slavery that feature Black characters at the center of the storyline. As a result of this effort, a significant number of neo-slave narratives have become a part of the curriculum in many schools across the United States. The presence of these texts in school and classroom libraries offers opportunities for students to examine what slavery was like and to explore how the institution shaped and still continues to influence the society that we

live in today.

Moreover, the presence of these texts in the classroom and the use of a similar approach to the analysis of these texts that appears in this dissertation provide readers with an opportunity to learn more about the contribution and experiences of Blacks in this country. As D. P. Glenn (1994) asserts, for “some students this type of ‘vicarious contact’ with [Blacks] by way of literature might be the only interaction that some children have with this group.” (p. 273). If this is the case, teachers may want to have students read neo-slave narratives alongside realistic fiction texts about African Americans. They also will probably want to present these texts similar to the way that they have been discussed in this study. It is important for teachers to help students realize that there is a great deal of diversity in the way that historians and contemporary writers have represented the history of slavery. Such an approach could possibly help students to understand that the experiences of those who lived under slavery were diverse, and not monolithic.

This study can also serve as an example of a methodological approach that can be used to explore the historical discourses that teachers are required to cover in the classrooms. This dissertation shows that historical fiction allows young readers to become intricately involved with the everyday lives of people in the past. This study also shows that historical fiction can help students understand that there are multiple viewpoints in history and discover that there are many connections between the past and present. This understanding can help students to realize their world in context and to understand that the past has shaped the present. Furthermore, this knowledge can lead students to recognize that decisions made in the present will determine their future, much like past practices have a hold on how we are currently organized as a society.

However, despite the benefits regarding the classroom use of historical fiction, this researcher recognizes the common concern that these texts may contain information that is misleading, outdated, or inaccurate (Beck, Nelson- Faulkner, and Pierce, 2000; Levistick & Barton, 2001; Short, 1997). Levistick and Barton (2001) argue that there are many instances in which recent historical fiction texts have been “blatantly inaccurate, cursed with tunnel vision, and mired in romanticism . . . [and] historical events are rearranged or facts are omitted to avoid controversy.” (p. 110). Moreover, scholars have long written about and been concerned with the way writers and illustrators manipulate historical facts to fulfill their own writing agendas (Groce & Groce, 2001; Levistick & Barton, 2001; Short, 1997).

For classroom teachers who are wary of using historical fiction because they share some of the concerns listed above, this dissertation can be useful in showing an approach to examine these texts that allows readers to explore the complex issue of authenticity in fictional representations of history. On a whole, this study shows the importance of reading fictional accounts of history against the historical scholarship. In fact, this work also shows that reading historical fiction in isolation is certainly not enough to present the history of a period in a thorough and detailed manner.

Additionally, the approach used in this study can serve as an authentication process whereby students engage in determining what historical discourses are present in fictional texts, as well as take up the issue of determining the accuracy of the narratives. Including the intertextual approach used in this dissertation in lesson plans that feature historical fiction texts can assist students in identifying specific arguments or perspectives from the historiography about a particular topic that may have been inserted into a text to enhance



the plot or sensationalize the story. This dissertation shows that reading fictional accounts against historiography can help young readers to understand the complex nature of how history is recorded, presented, shaped, argued, and represented.

In conclusion, this study suggests an intertextual and multilayered approach for studying and teaching neo-slave narratives for children. This research project demonstrates that critical multicultural practices hold great promise for researchers and educators to study history through literature, foregrounding the complexities of power relations in the past.

### **Sociopolitical Implications**

Today slavery still remains on the minds of many. The release of seven high grossing slavery themed movies in 2013 and the very successful 2014 opening Kara Walker's "A Subtlety", an exhibit in Brooklyn's Domino Sugar Factory that highlights the legacies of white supremacy, capitalism, colonialism, anti-blackness, slavery, and patriarchy provide some evidence that the institution remains a significant part of our public memory. Furthermore, a recent controversy in Brookline, Massachusetts over the use of a 2014 elementary school textbook published by Harcourt that contained a passage that states that slaves were treated well or cruelly depending on their owners and that some planters took pride in being fair and kind to their slaves reveals that the public continues to grapple with the representation of slavery that were considered in this study.

There has been in the American psyche something essential in trying to determine what slavery has meant to this nation. What is its legacy? In some ways, representations and retellings of slavery explore not only what life was like for individuals who lived under the institution, but rather what it is (in the present tense) to American society and

identity. Encapsulated with complex issues of cultural trauma, violence, racial fear and anger, debates about historiography and citizenship, and more essentially definitions of humanity and personhood as Hazel Carby (1989), slavery is the “pre-history” or “pre-text” of Black/White racial politics in the United States. Contemporary stories about slavery also seem to interrogate or reaffirm issues of racial, class, and gender inequity in a system that is defined by race, class, and gender difference. The study of neo-slave narrative also offers opportunities for readers to engage with and disentangle racial myths that have been reconstructed for centuries. In the course of this disentanglement in their consideration of these texts readers will continue to be haunted by the legacies of the institution. Even though it fades further and further into the distance, slavery still remains with us and provides insights into racial power dynamics and strife in the United States. Maria José Botelho and Masha Rudman In its exploration of how slavery has been re-cast and re-shaped in children’s picture books about slavery, it is clear that in their retellings of the past writers and illustrators are also revealing their anxieties and hope about contemporary times.

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